

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY STUDIES IN ENGLISH  
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THEATRICAL CRITICISM  
IN LONDON TO 1795





# THEATRICAL CRITICISM IN LONDON TO 1795

BY

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## PREFACE

Although there have been greater periods in English drama than the eighteenth century, there has been no period in which the theatre was more prominent in the life of London and the genius of the actors and directors of the theatres more remarkable. There have been innumerable books written about the theatres and the actors. From Nell Gwynn to Mrs. Siddons, from Betterton to John Philip Kemble, the stage personalities have held unflagging interest for succeeding times. In some of the biographies and histories attempts have been made to recover from old periodicals the contemporary opinions about these actors and the plays they played in. The present study is the first comprehensive survey of these sources of opinion and information. As the period is a long one and the materials voluminous, the book makes no pretense of having dealt exhaustively with all the periodicals or all parts of the period. It is intended to show where discussion of the theatres will be found and to indicate generally—sometimes with more particularity—the quality and contents of that discussion. More intensive study of short portions of the material—either chronological sections or single periodicals—will reveal to future students more detailed connections between this contemporary criticism and the history of the drama and of literary criticism.

I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to Professor Ashley H. Thorndike for his encouragement and patience during the preparation of this study and for the assistance which his wide learning and wise critical judgments have been to me. His suggestions deserved to bear fruit in a better book. For frank and valuable criticism at certain stages I wish also to thank Professors George

C. D. Odell and Ernest H. Wright. I am grateful also to Professor Herbert R. Brown of Bowdoin College for generous assistance in reading proof. What I owe to Dr. Henry W. Wells and to another person who refuses to be named, I prefer not to try to put into words

Bowdoin College,  
April, 1931.

C. H. G.

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## INTRODUCTION

Theatrical criticism has become so well established in the daily and weekly newspapers and in the monthly magazines that it is surprising to learn how slowly it came to take its place there. If we may consider that English newspapers began about 1621, the date of Nathaniel Butter's news-letter called the *Courant, or Weekly News*, we shall find that it was approximately one hundred and fifty years before any periodicals granted space regularly to reports upon the performances in the theatres. The early newspapers, to be sure, were so little like the metropolitan dailies of today that they could hardly be expected to make such reports. It is strange, however, that when, about one hundred years after Butter's ventures, a newspaper did offer news and criticism of the theatres—and indeed from the hand of one of the most famous writers of the eighteenth century, Richard Steele—it set no precedent for the steady development of such reviewing. The present study of this phase of journalism—and phase of literary criticism—will trace the steps by which, through many false starts and hesitating attempts, the practice of regular theatrical reviewing became established in the periodicals of London.

The term "theatrical criticism" will be used instead of "dramatic criticism," for the purpose of making a perhaps slight distinction in the methods of two kinds of criticism of drama. The "theatrical critic," properly speaking, is one to whom the drama exists primarily as a performance in the theatre. The "dramatic critic" may at times dissociate the experience in the theatre from that which he has in his own private imaginative reading of the play. Fundamentally, of course, there can be no real clash of purposes here. The distinction in terms is kept merely to sug-

gest the conditions under which each critic works. In his critical principles, his attitudes, and his judgments, the theatrical critic is unmistakably influenced by his presence in the theatre night after night in audiences made up of all classes, where he is subjected to all the arts, not merely of the playwright but of the actors and producers. Although some dramatic critics may prefer to read plays under the more quiet conditions of a private study—as Charles Lamb said he preferred to read Shakespeare—it is perhaps not too much to assert that the play which is being thus criticized is quite a different thing from that which the theatrical critic sees produced in the theatre, nor to assert that the values which the play possesses in the theatre belong of right to the full work of art. Certainly it is to the many-sided art of the theatre that the theatrical critic of our periodicals must devote himself. His task requires a good deal more than a capacity to judge with knowledge and taste the art of writing. It requires a sensitiveness to the complementary arts of acting, painting, architecture, music, and dancing. The critic is not even free to judge the performance by the light of his own free intelligence, for he has become a part of an audience whose judgments, while they should not overwhelm, are certain to influence his own. Theatrical criticism, then, is a species of writing with peculiar interests and values.

Even in the matter of the plays themselves, the regular theatrical critic cannot be confined to those which might be of interest to the more respectable and cloistered dramatic critic. At any modern period the offerings in the theatres have included entertainments which have but the remotest connection with "literature." When the occasion does not call for serious "judicial" criticism, there may still be an opportunity for a lively essayist's mind to be stimulated to the writing of such immortal comment as Hazlitt's essay on "The Indian Jugglers." That the theatrical critic can sometimes write as profitably on the minor entertainments as on the serious drama may be seen in Steele's descrip-

tion of the rough-and-tumble farce of Bullock and Pinkethman,<sup>1</sup> and in Hazlitt's encomium upon the dancing of the Misses Dennett.<sup>2</sup>

Good theatrical criticism, then, may flourish in a period when the new plays are not of the highest order of excellence. Especially is this true in the period under study, because of the existence of the repertory system. While the English drama in the eighteenth century reached no heights of greatness, especially in tragedy, the repertoires of the theatres contained the masterpieces of the older drama, and the acting of these masterpieces was in some years of the period the best they have ever enjoyed. Furthermore the theatres probably occupied a more prominent place in the social life of London then than at any other time. Much of the interest in the writing about the theatres is not an interest purely in literary criticism, but in the image one gets from it of the life of the times. We read out of historical interest. Here we find mirrored, when the writers are vivid writers, the entertainments of another day. Historians of social life and national taste will find here abundant material.

Contemporary accounts of theatrical performances are to be found in a number of places besides the periodicals. After the Restoration the amount of published literary criticism increased greatly over that found in Elizabethan and early Stuart times. Prefaces to published plays or poems, dedicatory epistles, prologues and epilogues, verse essays following the example of Horace, and extended treatises on literary theory—all these include at times references to current performances and criticisms of contemporary drama. In diaries, like those of John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys, are preserved typical private judgments of plays and actors, and in the entries of Pepys we find some truly vivid glimpses of the Restoration stage; but the most valuable kind of

<sup>1</sup> *The Tatler*, No. 7, April 25, 1709.

<sup>2</sup> *London Magazine*, March, 1820. (*Collected Works*, Vol. VIII, pp 411-12.)

material next to the newspapers is the growing mass of pamphlets on single plays, or types of plays, or actors.

While the present study will not include the pamphlet criticism, some account of its varieties needs to be given. Like the prefaces and epistles already mentioned, this criticism is often more elaborate, more studied, and more thoughtfully written than the periodical criticism. But it is sporadic in its appearance, and waits for some production more provocative of thought or of animosities than the normal daily programme of the theatres provides. Flurries of publication are to be observed around the dates of such stimuli of controversy as Dryden's heroic plays in rhyme, Steele's sentimental comedy of *The Conscious Lovers*, Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, Colley Cibber's *Non-Juror*, and John Home's tragedy, *Douglas*. For example, Dryden published in 1672 *The Conquest of Granada*, with its unfortunate epilogue and with an essay "Of Heroique Plays" prefixed. During the next year was published at Oxford a reply called *The Censure of the Rota*, which was an attack on the heroic play as a type. At Cambridge in the same year another attack on Dryden was published with the ironical title, *The Friendly Vindication of Mr. Dryden from the Censure of the Rota By his Cabal of Wits*. This was followed by *Mr. Dryden Vindicated, in a Reply to the Friendly Vindication of Mr. Dryden. With Reflections on the Rota*; and also by *A Description of the Academy of the Athenian Virtuosi: with a Discourse held there in Vindication of Mr. Dryden's Conquest of Granada: against the Author of the Rota*. From dealing with single plays the pamphlets went on to treat whole groups, as in Elkanah Settle's *Reflections on Several of Mr. Dryden's Plays* (1687), or Charles Gildon's review of the works of Nicholas Rowe in two full pamphlets whose titles sufficiently describe them: *A New Rehearsal, or Bays the Younger. Containing an Examen of The Ambitious Stepmother, Tamerlane, The Biter, Fair Penitent, Royal Convert, Ulysses, and Jane Shore. All written by N. Rowe, Esq.: also a*

*Word or two upon Mr. Pope's Rape of the Lock* (1714); and the second edition (1715) which was expanded to *Remarks on Mr. Rowe's Tragedy of the Lady Jane Gray, and all his other Plays. Viz. The Ambitious Step-mother, Tamerlane, The Biter, The Fair Penitent, The Royal Convert, Ulysses, Jane Shore. With some Observations upon, I. Mr. Smith's Phaedra and Hippolytus. II. Mr. Philips's Distress'd Mother. III. Mr. Addison's Cato. IV. Mr. Pope's Rape of the Lock*, etc. Similar publications on a group of plays, more like reviews of a season's offerings, are the following: *Wit for Money: or, Poet Stutter. Containing Reflections on some late Plays: and particularly, on Love for Money, or, The Boarding-School* (1691), which was an attack on Thomas D'Urfey; and *Critical Remarks on the Four Taking Plays of this Season: viz. Sir Walter Raleigh, The Masquerade, Chit-chat, and Busiris King of Egypt. Dedicated to the wits at Button's Coffee-house. By Corinna, a Country Parson's Wife* (1719). Besides these and innumerable other pamphlets on single plays, there were many on the merits of the actors, and these in turn brought forth some on the principles of acting. Mention scarcely needs to be made of the mass of pamphleteering on behalf of the parties to the many theatrical squabbles of the eighteenth century, those perennial quarrels between managers and players, or between managers and the public. Finally there were the ever recurring attacks upon the morality of the stage. All these pamphlets and journalistic works contribute to the critical opinion of the period. They need to be related to the periodical criticism, for they fulfilled in their haphazard way the same functions which later the newspapers and magazines were to fulfill in a more regular manner.

The period covered by this study spans the evolution of literary criticism from the crystallizing of the neo-classic doctrines to their break-up in Romantic criticism. A critic of the period who had any learning at all was the inheritor of an elaborate theory of drama which had developed through a long series of

critics from Aristotle to Boileau. The period of most rapid development had been that of the Renaissance. After the revival of the ancient classics it seemed to the scholars of Europe that a well-nigh perfect art had been discovered in the drama of Greece and Rome. They were seized with the passion to see something like it in their own languages. They had before them the example of ancient plays and the explanation of the art which ancient critics had given. The duty of the Renaissance critic was to show the young dramatist how to do in his native Italian, French, or English that which the Greeks and Romans had done. The theory of drama which they developed was an attempt to explain how the ideal drama should be constructed, and to transplant to other lands and other ages an art which was peculiar to Athens in the days of Pericles. Without a thoroughgoing analysis of the truly fundamental principles of the art, the European critic strove to force the modern dramatist to imitate the outward forms of Greek drama. There resulted a body of doctrine, called the "rules" of the drama, which critics held up to dramatists for their guidance and by which they judged plays. These "rules" went under the name of Aristotle, but are to be traced rather to Horace and to later adaptors and commentators. By the eighteenth century the "rules" did not rest merely upon the "authority" of Aristotle, for men had come to believe that they could be derived out of the nature of things by pure logic. Thomas Rymer, in his Preface to a translation of Rapin's *Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie* (1674), states this position emphatically:

The truth is, what Aristotle writes on this subject, are (*sic*) not the dictates of his own magisterial will, or dry deductions of his Metaphysics, but the Poets were his Masters, and what was their practice, he reduced to principles. Nor would the *modern Poets* blindly resign to this practice of the *Ancients*, were not the Reasons convincing and clear as any demonstration in *Mathematicks*. 'Tis only needful to understand them, for our consent to the truth of them.

Though Rymer thus clearly saw what was Aristotle's way of working, it apparently did not occur to him to follow that way in dealing with English drama. During the years when the theory was crystallizing, the whole body of Elizabethan dramatic literature had grown up, and the no less great body of Restoration comedy. Yet neither Rymer nor his fellow critics took the English poets as their masters or tried to reduce their practice to principles. Instead, in their judgments of the older poets, and in their advice to new poets, they used a set of "rules" derived at long remove from a different species of dramatic art. It is true that in English criticism, especially that of the greater men, like Pope, Dryden, and Johnson, there are many assertions of distrust in "rules" for poetry. But, for want of great creative genius, both the dramatists and the lesser critics were powerfully influenced by the precepts of this neo-Aristotelian criticism.

Foremost in the "rules" were those famous "three unities," of time, place, and action, which sometimes were almost synonymous with the "rules" themselves. The crystallization of the doctrine of the unities was the work of commentators on Aristotle, chiefly certain Italians of the sixteenth century. The necessity for the action to be included within "one revolution of the sun," or twelve hours, or the time of representation on the stage, and to be confined to one place, or to places easily reached within the time of representation, was based not only upon the authority of Aristotle, but also, and chiefly, upon reasoning from the principle that the performance on the stage is meant to create a complete realistic illusion and hence must conform to the probabilities of actual life. English critics for the most part were unable to refute the reasoning but they remained unconvinced because of the example of Shakespeare, who violated the unities and yet wrote the most powerful drama which the critics had ever witnessed. In critical theory in England, therefore, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while there was much talk of the unities and an underlying sense of the salutary in-

fluence of such compression upon a dramatist's work, there was no whole-hearted acceptance of the doctrine, and there were significant outbursts against it.<sup>3</sup>

Among the "rules" also was the age-old separation of the kinds of drama. Tragedy and comedy should not be mingled in one play. A distinction between the two had been made by Aristotle on the basis of something near to moral nobility: tragedy was a serious action involving people who possessed that largeness of spirit, the quality including all other qualities, called by Spenser "magnificence"; comedy dealt with the actions of "characters of a lower type—not, however, in the full sense of the word bad," but ludicrous through "some defect of ugliness which is not painful or destructive."<sup>4</sup> But from some time not long after Aristotle this was interpreted to mean a distinction in social rank.<sup>5</sup> It was further developed by Italian and French critics until numerous correlative distinctions were added. Tragedy was to represent the fortunes of kings, princes, or great leaders, as opposed to comedy's humble persons and private citizens; tragedy was to deal with great and terrible actions; comedy, with familiar and domestic actions; tragic subjects were to be usually historical and tragic style elevated and sublime. Other distinctions were adopted from the traditional medieval view of tragedy; for example, tragedy begins happily and ends unhappily, comedy begins in turmoil and ends in peace and joy.<sup>6</sup> Because of all these specifications there arose a lively battle over tragi-comedy, that native English mixture of tragic plot and comic underplot. Furthermore, the "rule" which condemned

<sup>3</sup> Notably in Sir Robert Howard's Preface to *The Grec Favourite, or the Duke of Lerma* (1668); George Farquhar's *Discourse on Comedy* (1702); and finally, with the last annihilating stroke, Samuel Johnson's Preface to his edition of Shakespeare (1765).

<sup>4</sup> Butcher, S. H. *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, 1923, p. 21, (*Poetics*, V. 1)

<sup>5</sup> Springarn, J. E. *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, 1912, p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> Springarn, *loc. cit.*

such a hybrid did not rest merely upon the authority of ancient example and precept, but also upon "good taste." Shakespeare's comic episodes were branded as barbarous and absurd. Now that the taste of the nation had become more "refined," those scenes could be looked upon only as blemishes. To the appeal to authority had been added the force of appeal to "common sense," here named "taste."

The "rules" went further and prescribed how the characters should act. Horace had made some suggestions in his *Ars Poetica* about keeping speech and action appropriate to the characters. old men should speak as old men, and so forth. These suggestions had been generalized into a "rule" and then applied to dramatic writing with relentless logic. This was the "rule" of "decorum." If the characters were drawn from well-known stories, the poet must consider them as already set for him; he must "follow report" and not attempt to change the outlines. "Medea must be all revenge and blood, Ino all tears, Ixion all deceit."<sup>7</sup> And there must be no confounding of characters; actions and language must show the man, yet not more the man than the rank. As for characters whom the poet invents, care must be taken to make them "coherent," that is, a king should speak and act like a king; a bumpkin like a bumpkin. That there might be kings who were no more than bumpkins did not destroy the "rule"; such instances would be exceptions, not natural, not instructive. This development of a hint from Horace reaches its acme in English criticism in Thomas Rymer's *Tragedies of the Last Age* (1678), from which we gather maxims like the following:

Tragedy cannot represent a woman without modesty as natural and essential to her . . . In poetry no woman is to kill a man, except her quality gives her the advantage above him, nor is the servant to kill the master, nor a private man, much less a subject, to kill a king, nor on the contrary. Poetical decency will not suffer death to be dealt

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<sup>7</sup> Roscommon, Earl of, translation of Horace's *Ars Poetica*

to each other by such persons, whom the laws of duel allow not to enter the lists together.

Thus by the beginning of the eighteenth century the doctrine of decorum had been stated in its extreme form.

Another of the "rules" was the demand that the rewards and punishments at the end of the play be equitably distributed. As the drama must teach as well as please, obviously it must not shock the audience's sense of justice. The spectacle of a wicked man reaping prosperity from his wickedness could have no effect upon men but to make them lose faith in the just ordering of the world. It might lead them into evil deeds themselves. Surely, on the other hand, there could be no incentive to follow righteousness if righteous and innocent men and women were shown faring unhappily. It was hence the dramatist's duty to uphold morality by showing the evil results of evil-doing and the good fortunes reserved for the innocent and good. It mattered not that in actual life such equitable and morally desirable results did not always follow. Nor could a dramatist escape by saying that justice would presumably be done in after-life by a just god. It was the dramatist's duty to portray life in such a way as to make virtue attractive and vice odious; the bit of life taken by him for his play was his to order as he wished; and he must do justice rigorously. He was to be another Providence to show how Divine Providence works in the long run. Now Aristotle had recorded a preference for the tragedy with the unhappy catastrophe, even when it involved in the unhappiness the innocent and comparatively good people. The mixed tragedy in which there is a good ending for the good, and a bad ending for the evil, he described as a lower order and showed no further interest in it than to suggest that it was more suitable to comedy. But his indifference was construed, for example, by John Dennis,<sup>8</sup> to mean that he placed the mixed type second only to the highest order of tragedy. Aristotle's authority, however, was

<sup>8</sup> Dennis, John. *A Letter to Mr. Spectator*, 1711.

not essential, the reasons, as Rymer had said about all the "rules," were as clear as any demonstration in mathematics. As soon as the doctrine of equitable distribution of rewards and punishments was established in the theory of tragedy, it was easily carried over into comedy. The moralists who at the end of the seventeenth century renewed the perennial Puritan attack on the stage took up this doctrine and wielded it like a flail on the backs of the Restoration comedy writers.<sup>9</sup>

A number of other articles of faith were held to with less common agreement among the critics. Some attempted to insist upon the use of the chorus, but partly because the thing was so utterly foreign to the practice of the English stage and partly because Aristotle had paid little attention to it, it met with no hearty support and even with opposition from some of the staunchest Grecians. Love as a theme for tragedy had slight classical precedent, but was popular through both Elizabethan and French practice. It became necessary either to find some general authority for it in Aristotelian criticism, or to discover in the nature of things reasons for its addition to the possible subjects. Furthermore, the regularizers of dramatic theory were forced to take account of the Elizabethan violence and bloodshed which persisted upon the English stage. Even idolaters of Shakespeare scoffed at the English love of seeing violent actions; they called it a sign of the lack of delicate taste, a sign of the brutality of the nation. But few of them could go so far as the French had gone in restraining such scenes. In general they were ready to compromise with the English custom, praising the gain in vividness and passionate appeal which came from allowing important actions to occur before the eyes of the audience, but at the same time calling a halt when tasteless barbarities like some of the scenes in Elizabethan tragedy were thrust before them. A lively contest was waged after the Restoration over the

<sup>9</sup> See Krutch, Joseph Wood. *Comedy and Conscience after the Restoration*. New York, 1924.

use of rhyme instead of blank verse in tragedy. Blank verse was, however, too strong an opponent, both by right of possession and by what was thought to be the genius of the language. By the beginning of the eighteenth century tragedy in heroic couplet was defunct. As Shakespeare's mingling of prose and verse was a vagary that found few imitators, eighteenth-century tragedy continued on a dead level of blank verse. The attempt to introduce prose in domestic tragedy like Lillo's *London Merchant* was unheard of yet. When it came it affected the language of serious comedy, to which domestic tragedy was near allied, more than that of tragedy.

Near the end of the seventeenth century, then, we find well established in formal criticism a code of "rules" which was to serve the double purpose of manual for the playwright and body of law by which the critic passed judgment. Naturally there could be no general agreement on all the statutes. Individual critics placed the emphasis in different places and voiced varying opinions at different stages of their careers. Whereas a critic might violently denounce some "rules," he might just as vigorously support others. Addison, for example, called "poetic justice" a "ridiculous doctrine in modern criticism,"<sup>10</sup> but further on called tragico-comedy "one of the most monstrous inventions that ever entered into a poet's thoughts."<sup>11</sup> Also the reasoning by which the individual critics arrived at the doctrines was as varied as the men themselves. One of the frequent declarations was that they did not believe in binding poets by rule. Yet they went on to assert that any sensible man who would examine the doctrines which they urged upon him would find that his reason would arrive at the same conclusions. Hence arose all those attempts to save the sanctity of "genius" or "nature" and at the same time insist upon "art." Furthermore, throughout the discussions all the critics, except perhaps one or two of the most

<sup>10</sup> The *Spectator*, No. 40, April 16, 1711.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

violent doctrinaires, honestly felt and celebrated what Charles Gildon called the "witchery" of Shakespeare. To be sure, Shakespeare was not yet freed from trial by rule, but in men's appreciation of some qualities in him lay hope that he and his critics would one day be released from bondage. Meanwhile there floated before the critics' minds the vague pattern of some "regular" play which would exhibit both "nature" and "art," "nature methodiz'd." When presented with a new play, they worked from without inward, from the "method" to the "nature," and very often did not get below that outward shell to the life within. But whether or not the dramatists of the day paid any attention to the theories, and whether or not the audiences preferred the plays that broke every rule, the critic's business was still to hold up to view his vision of the ideal drama.

The man who would become a critic of the drama about the year of Dryden's death, then, found himself in the midst of many controversies. He had to take his stand on one side or the other of each of these. He had to be ready to give a complete, reasoned theory of drama, its aims and the most effective means by which these aims could be reached. He had to find his way about in the controversy over the ethical basis of all drama; for Jeremy Collier and some of his followers were attacking not only the abuses prevalent in the drama of their day but the very existence of the drama itself. Once past the danger of becoming an opponent of this sort, the new critic must make his definition of tragedy and comedy clear; he must decide whether he would emphasize the ethical or the aesthetic theory, pleasing instruction or instructive pleasure. He must decide whether a play should hold the mirror up to nature or should arrange the facts of life in a way conducive to more righteous living. The unities he would perforce accept in theory, but he must decide whether to interpret them loosely or strictly; for there was authority for either interpretation. He must decide by force of reason whether it was good taste to mix comic matter with tragic.

He must further decide whether he would or would not be shocked at the spectacle of vice triumphant and virtue brought low; whether he would be shocked only if in serious tragic action he failed to find equitable distribution of rewards and punishments. Then he must be able to say what he thought of Shakespeare. How far could he go in admiration? What emphasis upon "nature," what upon "art"? What could he say about those inexplicable stirrings which disturbed him at a presentation of *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*? Should he with Rymer explain that effect by saying that not Shakespeare but the actors, Hart and Mohun, had created it? These and other problems must be settled before he could ever hope to express himself as a critic. For to criticize was to do just this: to affirm certain principles and then to apply them rigorously to the drama.

On the one side, then, the critics with their principles, or "rules"; on the other, the theatre and its plays. Already by the opening of the eighteenth century a body of drama had been produced quite independently of the critical theories. English drama, while in both the Elizabethan and the Restoration periods it had been influenced by classical theory and practice and by modern Italian and French theory and practice, had grown up under other conditions of life and of presentation, and hence it called for other bases of judgment. During the heyday of Elizabethan tragedy, tragi-comedy, and romantic comedy, and of Restoration comedy of manners, dramatists worked, if not in ignorance or defiance of the theories, at least in indifference to them. The plays had succeeded with audiences in the theatres; they were the money-makers. "The drama's laws the drama's patrons give," said Samuel Johnson later. What the laws of this established dramatic repertory were is not to be discovered by any study of the theory of drama formulated by the critics. Popular drama had its roots in early theatrical conditions and could not be studied as they tried to study it. Elizabethan tragedy broke all the rules: it did not observe the unities of time,

place, and action; it did not separate comic from tragic matter strictly; it did not distribute equitable rewards and punishments at the catastrophe; it lugged upon the stage all manner of violent scenes instead of narrating them through the mouths of messengers, it did not take care that social ranks were properly distinguished in everything the characters said and did. But in spite of this, and in the very days when the critics were developing their code, such thoroughly typical plays as *Hamlet* and *Othello* were played on the English stage almost without alteration up to the eighteenth century. The later Elizabethans had written a kind of play which was tragic in mood but happy in its ending, and which mingled some comic matter with the serious. This type, of which *A King and No King* is an example, became a favorite after the Restoration. Tragedies continued to be written in imitation of both this type and the purer tragedy, and thus Elizabethan tragedy, not Greek, Roman, or French, forms the basis of the tragedy which predominates between the Restoration and 1700, except in those years when the passion for heroic plays in rhyme was upheld by Dryden. In comedy likewise, while the Restoration writers were able to fuse the elements and to bring the comedy of manners to perfection, most of the elements can be traced back to Elizabethan and early seventeenth-century comedy, namely the wit, the comic intrigues, and the portrayal of "humours." The fusion was made, furthermore, without reference to any theories of comedy. Like the popular tragedy, this comedy was rooted in theatrical conditions.

In spite of the strength of the theatrical traditions in favor of these two groups of plays, in some other directions the critical doctrines were beginning to have some effect. The most notable break in the history of the popular drama was the strange passion for the rhymed heroic play which Dryden made famous. This type had its sources partly in stage tradition, partly in newer stage conditions, partly in French romance, and partly in the dramatic theories of the French critics. Though popular

for a time, it remains a freak off the main line of development. The Elizabethan tradition was too strong. Criticism showed more lasting influence on tragedy in the development of the newer forms of "Augustan" tragedy. This type took something from Elizabethan sources, something from the French classical drama, something from the French romance of *La Calprenède* and *Mademoiselle de Scudéry*, and finally something from the discussions of theory, the source to which it turned least often was life itself. The personages were taken from history or romance in far corners of the world, Mexico, Persia, or the Far East. Love was its chief concern, but the fortunes of love were mixed with the fortunes of political intrigue. At first several plots were woven together with intricacy if not with probability, and at first one of the plots might be comic. The catastrophe was usually but not always calamitous. Most of the action took place off stage and was narrated in long discourses in swelling blank verse which never descended to common language but never reached the imaginative heights of the Elizabethan dramatic language. The characters were people of high rank, with no distinguishing marks except their manners and a code of honor supposedly belonging to the higher ranks of society; kings and queens never could be taken for anything else, not even for men and women. As Mrs. Charlotte Lennox said later on in the century, they were "mere phantoms that strut upon the stage"—but they strutted with due decorum. Out of this chaos of elements which thus appeared in the first efforts, a more or less fixed form evolved. The fixation followed the popularity of Voltaire in dramatic practice as well as theory. Since this drama was written with some direct reference to the dramatic theories of the time, the critic had a show of right to judge it by his "rules."

In comedy, furthermore, the last years of the seventeenth century saw the approach of change. The comedy of manners was facing terrific attacks from the moralistic critics and was about

to succumb. The art of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve was sound; they looked upon the life of the court circle with sure perception of its true spirit, in addition they saw its ridiculous vanities and vices, and they laughed at these with superior knowingness and cynical tolerance. That the life which they portrayed was in fact licentious and degraded did not vitiate their art. But the moralists who found the immorality in both life and the plays attributed it all to the power of the drama over men's manners. They demanded a new kind of play-making to reform society. For their arguments they turned to the theories of the critics, and more especially to the doctrine of poetic justice. Ridicule was not enough for the foibles and follies which the dramatists anatomized, there must be added discomfiture and either punishment or repentance. Wit must be discarded for fine phrases of good feeling and sensible morality. Those demands were based on a theory of drama incompatible with good comedy the world over, and they made it very difficult for true comedy to lift its voice during the rest of the eighteenth century. The victims of the attack, instead of standing firm and asserting that drama, and especially their drama, had other ends to serve in other ways than the direct inculcation of morals, tried weakly to argue that their works could stand even on the moralists' own premises. Hence comedy became the handmaiden of morality and her tripping tongue slackened its pace to the cadence of pulpit eloquence in the drawing-room.

As the eighteenth century advanced we can see the struggle between the two kinds of comedy prolonged. Restoration comedy did not quickly succumb. The situations and characters familiar in that comedy were utilized over and over again by comic writers, though seldom did much remain of the wit or humor of Congreve and Wycherley. Mingled with these borrowings were scenes and characters belonging to the new mode of sentimental drama. Not until after 1760 did the tone of the whole play change so noticeably that one might say that the new tra-

dition was established. Again it is not true to say that Sheridan and Goldsmith drove the sentimental comedy from the stage in the seventies, as has been said by historians. Their comedies, with their laughter at the sentimental plays, only stimulated the controversy again for a time. The rest of the century accepted sentimental comedy as an established type and gave it almost first place in its repertory of new plays. Even the Restoration plays in the repertory were remodelled to conform to the spirit of the sentimental age. This century-long controversy of course drew in the critics as well as the dramatists.

Nor did the established repertory of the theatre, which was in its origins largely free from the influence of dramatic theory, wholly escape being tampered with. In the Restoration period began that alteration of Shakespeare, which was to continue far into the next century. It is not always easy for us to conceive just what disease of taste led to any particular mutilation. In not many instances does it appear to have been a passion for some doctrine. Most often the manager's desire for show, novelty, and theatrical catchpenny is uppermost. Poetic justice, however, is so obviously outraged by *King Lear* that that play did not long escape the doctrinaires. As the happy ending which Nahum Tate provided is also a much more soothing close for audiences—who in few theatres in the world can normally stomach high tragedy—the doctrinaires combined with the makers of dramatic soothing-syrup to destroy, as Addison was to say a few years later, half the beauty of the play. In the same version the Fool was omitted, and a love affair between Edgar and Cordelia provided the love theme, which had become so material to French tragedy and the English heroic play that it had almost become one of the “rules.” Again, it was not in the code of manners that a brother should stand in such relation to his sister as Claudio stands in *Measure for Measure*. In the altered version, therefore, not Claudio, but a woman who loved him and would at any cost save him made the indecorous proposal. The

thirty-eight scenes in *Antony and Cleopatra*, which take place in Alexandria, in Rome, in Syria—and where not?—extending over who knows how many years, were discarded for Dryden's *All for Love*, which concentrated upon the final phase of the drama, and in preserving the unities sacrificed the breadth and sweep of Shakespeare's play for a sharp, distinct effect of another kind In these ways and others we see the beginnings of influence from the doctrines of criticism.

Here again was a controversy into which the theatrical critic was bound to be drawn. The story of criticism in the eighteenth century, it might in truth be said, centers in the developments in the judgments about Shakespeare One of the signs of a change was a gradual restoration of neglected plays, like the romantic comedies, to the repertory, and the restoration of the original texts in place of the mutilated versions. In criticism, while there had been no lack of recognition of the genius of Shakespeare, it was the custom in the earlier years to combine a condescending admission of his native power with lamentations over his lack of "art" With all their stubborn resistance to the attempts of foreign critics to belittle him, the English critics in this century never established their instinctive admiration of him on satisfactory critical principles. There is no critic among them like Lessing or the Schlegels. They were not able to throw off the yoke of the neo-classic theory of drama

Gradually, however, signs of new emphasis in the criticism of drama did appear. First there was an emphasis upon the importance of character in drama, as against Aristotle's emphasis upon plot. Then there came the glorification of "passion." And then slowly the Romantic criterion of imagination came to be held up against the narrowly interpreted "nature" of the neo-classic critics. To all these changes the current repertory of the theatres contributed greatly, for the constant repetition of plays by Shakespeare, by other Elizabethans, and even by their late imitators, forced the critics into serious consideration of them

and into search for the principles which would explain the pleasure they gave. The critics who nightly had to review the theatrical performances were exposed to all the influences which helped to change the critical theory. A study of theatrical criticism in the periodicals, especially towards the end of the eighteenth century when the material becomes voluminous, will add to our understanding of the development of Romantic criticism.

A good deal of the entertainment offered in the theatres from the very opening of the period was of kinds which could not be approached with any of the accepted modes of criticism. The opera had been unknown to the Ancients and hence no standards could be found in classical criticism or in that of the Renaissance, although there were in Aristotle's *Poetics* some remarks upon "spectacle." Because of the preponderance of music, dance, scenic display, and pageantry—all sensuous appeal, and, as they said, "irrational"—the sober critics in the period under study never felt quite easy in their toleration of opera. They debated its value warmly and continually, while opera grew more and more popular and firmly entrenched. Not until very late did some reputable critics find in opera a serious kind of drama with laws of its own by which it might be judged. Most of the theatrical critics, after describing the sensuous effects, took refuge in criticizing the tragic or heroic story which usually formed the plot of the opera, and criticizing it as legitimate drama. In a similar manner the ballad opera, inaugurated by Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, was treated as pure comedy. But what could be done with the operatic versions of Shakespeare or Fletcher? When *The Tempest* was mentioned to a theatregoer in Restoration times, not Shakespeare's play but the opera of Davenant and Dryden came to mind. *Macbeth* became an opera with the scenes of the witches expanded with singing and dancing. Mr. Pepys found the play "a most excellent play for variety." The witches danced and sang as late as the days of John Philip Kemble. If the critics found Shakespeare's plays as he wrote

them difficult to appraise, what would they do with all these adaptations? And the bottom is not reached even when we get to interpolated song and dance and the transformation of play into opera. For the managers sought out the jugglers and tight-rope-walkers and performers of physical feats of all sorts to fill the gaps between the acts. That such things were the means by which the audiences were attracted is shown by the prominence given to them in the advertisements. The following is an example from the *Daily Courant*, 1703:

At the theatre in *Dorset Gardens*, this day being Friday the 30th of April will be presented a Farce, call'd *The Cheats of Scapin* And a Comedy of two acts only, call'd, *The Comical Rivals, or the School Boy* With several Italian Sonatas by Signor Gasperini and others And the *Devonshire Girl*, being now upon her Return to the City of Exeter, will perform three several Dances, particularly her last Entry in Imitation of *Mademoiselle Sublime*, and the Whip of Dunboyne by Mr. Claxton her Master, being the last time of their Performance till Winter. And at the desire of several Persons of Quality (hearing that Mr. Pinkethman hath hired the two famous French Girls lately arriv'd from the Emperor's Court) They will perform several Dances on the Rope upon the Stage being improv'd to that Degree far exceeding all others in that Art And their Father presents you with the *Newest Humours of Harlequin* as perform'd by him before the Grand Signor at *Constantinople* Also the Famous Mr. Evans lately arrived from Vienna will shew you wonders of another kind, Vaulting on the Manag'd Horse, being the greatest Master of that Kind in the World. To begin at Five so that all may be done by Nine a Clock.

Thus the plays were not only frequently mutilated or decked out in new finery to meet the demands of the audiences, but were often buried amid other stage attractions and became mere acts in the evening's variety entertainment.

For the criticism of acting, furthermore, almost no precedents had been set. Since the greater part of the repertory consisted of plays which were well known, discussion of performances must center in the acting rather than in the literary merits. Men felt they knew what *Hamlet* or *Othello* was; but what interested

them at the moment was the difference between Betterton's Hamlet and Booth's. We have almost no description of the acting in Shakespeare's day. It is impossible for us to get any picture of the way Burbage played Hamlet or Alleyn Tamburlaine. Their contemporaries gave them high praise and have told us some of the parts in which the chief actors were most admirable. During the earlier years of the Elizabethan drama there was probably a good deal of improvisational acting. The actors still performed as they had done in the Middle Ages, relying frequently upon their own fertility in making up dialogue as well as pantomime; they were still the strolling jesters entertaining the crowds. But even before the revolt voiced by Shakespeare in Hamlet's advice to the players, there must have been a higher conception of the art of the actor. Edward Alleyn, who probably played the great rôles in the plays of Marlowe and Greene, seems not only to have lifted his profession into a higher place in the respect of the community by his life and works, but also to have impressed the age with a dignified and profound manner of acting. Mantzius, in his *History of Theatrical Art*,<sup>12</sup> professes to have discovered a change in Burbage's style, from his youthful improvisational and spectacular manner to a more careful entrance into the characters. Flecknoe, in his *Short Discourse on the English Stage*, gives what appears to be the tradition about Burbage's final manner: he is said to have perfectly transformed himself into the character impersonated. Though this last assumption as to the ideal of the actor's art belongs to 1664, there had been evolved even in Shakespeare's day certain general principles. Hamlet's advice to the players perhaps contains all that any one could desire, and there are fragments elsewhere in Elizabethan literature. Thomas Heywood's *Apology for Actors*, 1612, gives an actor-manager's view of what the raw material of an actor should be, and further advises about the art itself:

<sup>12</sup> Mantzius, Karl *History of Theatrical Art* (1903-21), Vol III (1904), pp. 225-27.

And this is the action behoovefull in any that profess this quality [i.e. acting] not to use any impudent or forced motion in any part of the body, nor rough or other violent gesture, nor, on the contrary to stand like a stiff, starcht man, but to qualifie everything according to the nature of the person personated for in over-acting trickes, and toyling too much in the anticke habit of the humors, men of the ripest desert, greatest opinions, and best reputations, may breake into the most violent absurdities.

When Flecknoe gave his description of Burbage's acting, the conception of acting as impersonation was apparently widely current. Yet even so late, the conception had not been formulated, and only gradually after the Restoration did talk about actors and acting get a place in criticism. At first the discussion was largely about whether the rôle had been played *authoritatively*. Traditions had come down from Shakespeare's day and formed, in a sense, the actor's manual. The actor's business then was to follow the tradition. By those who knew, he was judged on his correctness, his "exactness," as the phrase went. Downes, the prompter, summed up<sup>13</sup> his praise of Wilks with the statement that he was "the finisht copy of his famous predecessor, Mr. Hart." But as men of distinct powers came to be pitted against each other in the same parts, the differing interpretations soon led to the study of the principles of the art of acting and to close observation of the finer points. The story of the stage in the eighteenth century is that of a succession of great actors with distinct styles of acting and of the rivalry among them for popular approval. These rivalries led to theoretical explanations and defenses of the different styles and to the formation of a literature about the ends and the technique of acting. At the opening of the century, however, this is still meager and practically unconscious of itself. Rymer, usually to be counted on for the extreme view, had spoken of the actors as a nuisance because they could make a spectator respond to a play against his better

<sup>13</sup> Downes, John *Roscius Anglicanus; or an Historical Review of the Stage . . . from 1660-1706*, 1708.

judgment. Whether or not many of the critics would have gone so far as this, the discussion of acting had no part in the formal criticism of the drama. To have suggested, what Hazlitt was later to declare, that the actors are often the best commentators on Shakespeare would have been to talk nonsense.

While the professional literary critics had all these problems to face, audiences in the theatres continued unhesitatingly to render daily their much more important judgments. Doubtless those judgments were to some extent affected by the theories which were in the air, for, of course, a certain large section of the audience was made up of men of wit and learning, though perhaps not specialists in the art of criticism itself. But, after all, the majority were there to be pleased, and their criticism was based on the fulfillment of that desire. If things which pleased them were against the "rules," the auditors probably did not know and certainly did not much care. And when plays made in all deference to the "rules" bored them, there was an end. Displeasure of an audience in those rowdyish days was not a thing to be braved without hesitation. Through the works of the critics are to be found frequent tirades against the popular judgments. Not only were the judgments of the critics reversed, but the plays occasionally put forward by those critics themselves to exemplify the truth of their doctrines were vigorously hissed. The actors and the makers of plays to be acted could not overlook the demands of the drama's patrons. Prologues were filled with flattery for the taste of the pit and boxes and with good-natured chaffing for the galleries. That the drama's patrons could be the drama's tyrants is clear from many a disgraceful occurrence. At any rate

The drama's laws the drama's patrons give,  
And he who lives to please, must please to live.

Many complaints were made by authors and actors and by serious devotees of art and letters against the criticisms rendered by the motley crowds assembled from gallery to pit. It was not

merely the crowd's ignorance of all literary canons which disturbed these complainants, but the prejudices which turned the judgment quite away from artistic concerns to others merely political or personal. One thinks at once of the famous first night of Addison's *Cato* (1713), when Whig and Tory took sides and so completely turned the evening into a political fray that no one to this day knows how an audience of the time would have received such a play as a play. Lewis Theobald discusses the general tendency in No. 93 of his periodical, the *Censor*, May 25, 1717:

I don't know how it is, but of late Days, People seem to come to the Theatric, neither to be diverted nor instructed. Party and private Sentiments have so great a Prevalence, that the chief View with them is to wrest an innocent Author to their own Construction, and form to themselves an Idea of Factio[n] from Passages, whence the Poet little suspected it should arise.

The necessary Consequence of these Prepossessions is turning the Scene to a Libel upon the State; when an Audience is neither employ'd on the Conduct of the Story, nor Excellence of the Player, but sit stupidly listening for accidental Expressions struck out of the Story, which speak the Sense of their own Principles and Perswasion. Such an Application of Passages is grown so epidemical, that a War of *Whig* and *Tory* is carried on by way of *Clap* and *Hiss* upon the Meaning of a single Sentence, that, unless prophetically, could never have any Relation to Modern Occurrences.

Later in the century, Bonnel Thornton in the *Connoisseur*, No. 43, November 21, 1754, repeats this charge that plays were denied a fair hearing in the pit, "the grand Court of Criticism":

Parties and private cabals have often been formed to thwart the progress of merit, or to espouse ignorance and dulness. for it is not wonderful, that the Parliament of Criticism, like all others, should be liable to corruption.

The audiences took sides not merely for political reasons, but also frequently out of purely personal likes and dislikes. Colley Cibber, in the address "To the Reader" prefixed to *Ximena, or the Heroick Daughter* (1719), complained that his plays had

always fared better when it was not known that he had any share in them, or when the success would no longer aid him materially. He complained of the devices of a “set of well-dress’d merry-making Criticks” in the side boxes, by whom a play and its author were ridiculed; and he declared that he knew instances when support was given to weak plays by the same personal interest:

For with some leading Man of the Town, or celebrated Wit at the head of them, they have often been known, by their overbearing Manner of Applause, to make a wretched sickly Play stand upon its Legs for Six Days together: But (as in mine, and most Cases) when they are not so engag’d and marshall’d, they naturally run Riot into Mischief and Cruelty

This hint about a leader in the pit is borne out by some remarks in the *Memoirs of George Ann Bellamy* (1785), Volume I, page 54. Miss Bellamy says that as the curtain rose upon her début in London her confusion of spirits became so overpowering that finally

compassion for my youth . . . induced a gentleman who was dictator to the pit and therefore ludicrously denominated Mr Town to call out, and order the curtain to be dropped, till I could recover my confusion.

This “Mr. Town,” whom a note identifies as a certain Mr. Chitty, appears several times in Miss Bellamy’s *Memoirs* as a leader of forces in the pit.

The critics in the audience also found outlet for their opinions in the conversation of coffee-houses and taverns. There the post-mortems were held upon the evening’s plays and the acting. Many a good answer to Rymer and Voltaire has doubtless floated away on the fumes of tobacco from Will’s or Button’s or the Cocoa-Tree. In these places were formed the vicious cabals which condemned plays without an honest hearing. The judgments of these groups were feared by authors and actors, because they might lead to the vigorous support of the next performance, or to riotous condemnation. Here that “awful body”

called "the Town" was likely to be organized; and "the Town" was a power more to be feared than the writings of scholars.

It was to this same "Town" that the periodicals addressed themselves. They offered a new outlet for the "Town's" judgments on the drama. The object of the present study is to give an account of the growth of criticism of theatrical entertainments in London as a part of this periodical literature. All the writing about the current productions will be examined, whether it deals with plays, new or old, or with the acting and other aspects of the performances. At one extreme will be the discussion of the financial and personal affairs of the theatres, their managers and patentees; at the other, discussions of drama in general, its artistic principles and its social function. Theatrical criticism, where it attempts to be criticism worthy of the name, will reflect the contemporary ideas about drama, will give the historian of the drama important information, and will afford vivid glimpses of the living drama. Sometimes the theatrical critics will represent the learned critics who clung to the established theories; at other times they will represent the common playgoer of London. Occasionally, however, they will be seen striking out on new lines themselves and demanding, through the very nature of their own task, new ways of looking at drama and new principles by which to judge it.

## CHAPTER I

### THE BEGINNINGS TO 1730

The newspaper in England began in the seventeenth century in the “news-letters” reporting regularly the progress of foreign wars and diplomacy. At first the letters were mere epitomes of news and rumors. Then they began to be colored by the political opinions of their writers, and what we call “editorial comment” crept in, at first surreptitiously, and later openly in the form of political discussions like those in Defoe’s *Review*. Their interest remained entirely political and religious, however. The first successful daily paper, the *Daily Courant*, beginning in 1702, and the host of dailies which soon began to flood the city of London—*London Post*, *Evening Post*, *Post Man*, *Post-Boy*, and the like—were direct descendants of the “news-letters” and did not depart radically from them in make-up. Political, financial, and commercial news continued to predominate. To this may be added occasional accounts of curious domestic happenings, sensational news of robberies, murders, trials, and so forth. The papers also early became bearers of advertisements. Journals of this primitive sort may be found running all the way through the eighteenth century, almost unaffected by the development of more complex forms.

The first great influence upon the primitive news-sheets was that of the periodicals of discussion. Defoe set up the *Weekly Review of France and England* in 1704, not merely to give the news of the week, but to direct the opinions of his readers in political and religious affairs. Steele began the *Tatler* in 1709 as notes of “news” from the coffee-houses. It is of course well

known that this periodical soon came to be a series of comments upon men and manners and that finally each number became a single essay. The *Tatler* and the *Spectator* were followed by innumerable imitators. The periodical essays became one of the most characteristic forms of literature in the eighteenth century. Since these essay papers were not always financially successful by themselves, they soon came to be printed in the daily and weekly newspapers, as special features or a kind of "leading article." The reader could thus get the "news" and his periodical essays in the same sheet. Another feature of the *Tatler* had been the real or fictitious "letters from correspondents." The daily and weekly papers—this phrase must of course include also the numerous papers published three times a week—took the hint and invited correspondence. They became "open forums" for discussion of all human questions, political, religious, social, literary, and antiquarian. The "correspondents," just as in the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, were not always persons other than the editors; their pseudonyms—Pro Bono Publico, Britannus, Theatricus, and the like—doubtless often cloaked the conductors of the paper, who wished not to take too openly a partial stand in affairs but to keep up the pretense of conducting an impartial paper open to all opinions. In many instances, however, there is reason to believe that the columns were open to *bona fide* correspondence on all sides of questions. The papers are sometimes half filled with these letters, which therefore become important for the student of public opinion. In these two ways the primitive news-sheets were altered in the direction of the modern newspaper.

By the middle of the century, then, the greater newspapers began to be established and to run for many years, often far into the nineteenth century. They had taken on a more or less fixed structure according to "departments." There was a department of foreign news, dispatches from the foreign capitals. In some papers more partisan than others, there would be a section

of comment upon the news, an editorial or "leading article." When this appeared, it was frequently the first section, often the whole front page of the weeklies. Domestic news included political news, reports from Parliament, and sensational news from all parts. There was a large section devoted to correspondence from "constant readers." There was often a section of reprints from other papers, especially in the less frequently published periodicals. Financial and commercial information—the day's bankrupts, the sailings and arrivals of vessels, quotations on the stock markets—took considerable space. Lastly there were the advertisements. Of course, there were infinite variations in the proportions given to each of these departments, depending upon the editors and upon the readers to whom they wished to appeal. Once set, however, the make-up of any periodical was likely to remain substantially the same throughout its existence. The exception seems to be that theatrical criticism as a special department came and went fitfully, never knowing whether it should or should not hold its place by rights.

Where, then, in such papers was it likely that criticism of the current theatrical performances should creep in and come to occupy a permanent place? Obviously the leading article, with the English reader characteristically thirsting for things political, could set aside only a few numbers each year for discussion of the theatre. Only when troubles between theatrical managers and their patrons should have become matters of grave public concern, not so much from artistic as from social considerations, could the editor devote his attention to that one activity of the metropolis. Under the advertisements we may expect news of the theatre, but hardly criticism. In the correspondence there will be an opportunity both for the editors, under disguises, and for the persons of the audiences who may be especially interested to voice their opinions of plays and performers. Finally, when departments become separated distinctly, there will some day grow up a regular section for news of the theatre, and eventually for essays in criticism.

In addition must be mentioned the monthly periodicals, though except at a few important points they do not contribute much to our study. They began as "miscellanies" of prose and poetry. With the founding of the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1731 began the long list of magazines that summed up the news of the month, kept the readers in touch with affairs social and literary, sometimes political, and gave forth new poems and new stories and criticism of newly published books. Here quite obviously was a natural opening for news and criticism of the theatre.

We may now turn to a more detailed account of the actual development of the department of theatrical criticism in these periodicals of London in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The news-letters or news-books of the seventeenth century are not without some news of the theatres. The news-letters began to have much wider circulation during the Commonwealth Period, while the theatres were closed. It has been revealed by students of these sheets, however, that a great many facts about the history of the theatres and the players during this period can be gathered from them. None of these can be called criticism, nor differ from other news items. The news sometimes appears as advertisement of proposed performances. "In the weekly news pamphlets published by John Crouch . . . advertisements of proposed performances, usually at the Red Bull, are frequently inserted."<sup>1</sup>

The first regular reporting of the theatrical performances which I have been able to find is in the first of the monthly miscellanies.<sup>2</sup> The *Gentleman's Journal; or, The Monthly Miscel-*

<sup>1</sup> See Rollins, H. E., "The English Commonwealth Drama" in *Studies in Philology*, Vol 18, p 305, and note

<sup>2</sup> Walter Graham, in *The Beginnings of English Literary Periodicals*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1926, p 31, reports his belief that "the first serious English periodical to contain discussion of the stage" was *Miscellaneous Letters*, 1694-96. No 10 and No. 11 were respectively "A Dissertation in Condemnation of the Stage and Players," and "The Refu-

*lany: By way of a Letter to a Gentleman in the Country: Consisting of News, History, Philosophy, Poetry, Musick, Translations, etc.* was issued monthly from January, 1691/2, to July, 1694. It contained new poetry, new songs, with the music, and essays on many subjects, including anatomy, history, and theology. The editor was Peter Anthony Motteux, the Anglicized Norman who with Sir Thomas Urquhart and others was later to translate Rabelais and was himself to translate Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Motteux was a lively man of letters who had a long career as East India trader, journalist, and writer of plays operas and occasional poetry. He conducted this miscellany with considerable sprightliness and charm.<sup>3</sup> Among those whose work appeared in it were William Congreve, John Tutchin, Charles Gildon, John Dryden, and Henry Purcell. The contents included announcements of new books and of books projected. Most of the references to the theatre are in the form of these mere announcements, but occasionally the writer makes comment upon the success and merits of the plays and performers. A typical announcement is that of Thomas Southerne's new comedy, *The Wives' Excuse; or Cuckolds Make Themselves*, in the issue for January, 1691/2:

It was written by Mr. Southern, who made that call'd *Sir Anthony Love*, which you and all the Town have lik'd so well I will send you *The Wives Excuse*, as soon as it comes out in Print, which will be very speedily And tho the Town hath not been so kind to this last, as to the former, I do not doubt that you will own that it will bear a Reading, which some that meet a better Fate too often do not; some that must be granted to be good Judges commend the purity of its Language.

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tation," both translations from the French, and not relating to the actual productions of the English stage at the time.

<sup>3</sup> A full account of the *Gentleman's Journal* is to be found in a paper by Dorothy Foster, entitled "The Earliest Precursor of Our Present-Day Monthly Miscellanies," in the *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, Vol 32 (N.S.25), 1917, pp. 22-58. Also see Graham, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-46.

In the same issue there is an essay on operas, Italian and English, and the promise is given of a new opera by Purcell. Also *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is announced for revival merely as "an old play." A later number (May, 1692) contains another quaint Shakespearean reference:

The Opera of which I have spoke to you in my former hath at last appeared, and continues to be represented daily; it is call'd, *The Fairy Queen*. The Drama is originally *Shakespear's*, the Music and Decorations are extraordinary. I have heard the Dances commended, and without doubt the whole is very entertaining.

Only for a play of John Dryden does the report grow into anything like criticism. In an announcement of Dryden's tragedy *Cleomenes* (February, 1691/2), the writer draws upon his admiration of Dryden's past works and upon his admiration for the historical character of Cleomenes and the Spartan people to make a prophecy that the new play will be an illustrious performance. In the May number it is reported that the play was acted with success. Then follows a long "Epistolary Essay to Mr. Dryden upon his *Cleomenes*." The critic explains the "representation of nature" in drama and the scope of tragedy. He then discusses the characters of Dryden's play, especially with reference to their historical truth, tested by knowledge of Sparta. He points out the striking scenes in the play. This is the first effort in English journalism at criticism of the contemporary drama, and it is the only extended effort throughout the two years' activity of the *Gentleman's Journal*.

From January, 1707, to January, 1708, there was issued monthly, under the editorship of John Oldmixon, a successor to the *Gentlemen's Journal*, called the *Muses' Mercury: or the Monthly Miscellany: Consisting of Poems, Prologues, Songs, Sonnets, Translations, and other Curious Pieces, Never before Printed. By the Earl of Roscommon, Mr. Dryden, Dr. G——th, N. Tate, Esquire, Mr. Dennis, Dr. N——n, Captain Steel, Mr. Manning, etc. To which is added, An Account of the STAGE, of the New OPERAS and PLAYS that have been acted, or are to*

*be Acted this Season; and of New Books relating to Poetry, Criticism, &c., lately Published.* Although this title, with its emphasis upon the section devoted to the theatre and with its list of contributors including men closely connected with the drama, would lead us to expect a fine growth of theatrical criticism, the issues now extant show little of it. The writers are indeed friendly towards the contemporary drama for in the first number appears an account "Of the Operas and Plays now Preparing for the two Theatres in Drury Lane and the Hay-Market" in which praise is lavished upon Henry Purcell, the composer, upon opera as an entertainment (in a day when that form of drama was not always held in good repute by the more learned and respectable public), upon the managers of the theatres and the noblemen who supported by subscription the revivals of *Julius Caesar* and *A King and No King*. There is also an essay entitled "The Dispute about the Stage Reviv'd" attacking a recent treatise about the immorality of the drama.<sup>4</sup> Besides being champion of the stage, the *Mercury* served to announce new operas and plays, as did the *Gentleman's Journal*. By March the authors were complaining that operas got too much encouragement and plays not enough, and declared their faith in the present dramatic genius if only it might be encouraged as the operatic genius was. In the July number appeared *The Stage Vindicated. A Satyr. By I. H. Esq.* This is an answer to Jeremy Collier and Arthur Bedford. The author admits that there are some evils in the drama, but declares that the fault lies not with the art but with the artists. He finds that the Restoration drama did depict the life of the times, and that the standards of those times were set not by the artists but by

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Bedford *The Evil and Danger of Stage Plays: Shewing their Natural Tendency to Destroy Religion, and Introduce a General Corruption of Manners; In almost Two Thousand instances, taken from the Plays of the two last years, against all Methods lately used for their Reformation* Bristol. 1706.

the Court. Turning to the drama of his own time the satirist finds indeed no immorality but also no "art" and no "nature." This is one of the timid attempts of a few critics in the years following 1698 to set up a critical canon which could save the Restoration comedy from the onslaughts of Jeremy Collier and his followers. But the *Muses' Mercury* brought forth less criticism of this sort than we could wish. It found the supply of new verse abundant, and between that and prose criticism, which its authors thought might seem tedious to the readers, it chose the verse. Comments upon new plays were, therefore, as scanty as those in the *Gentleman's Journal*. The attitude which the editors held towards criticism is indicated by a remark in the May number:

As to this *Phaedra*, 'tis not our business to treat of it critically: if the Publick had communicated any such work to us [i.e. a critique of the play] we question whether we shou'd have printed it. Because where there's hope of an Author's deserving well hereafter, 'twere foolish as well as unjust to discourage him now.<sup>5</sup>

The few attempts at criticism in these two monthly miscellanies are interesting but were not powerful enough to set a fashion.

With the establishment of the *Daily Courant* in 1702 the series of long-run periodicals began. There was set up a medium for regular reports of the contemporary theatres and for critical comments upon the new drama. But the possibilities of the medium were not at once seen by those directly concerned with the drama. On the other hand the newspaper publishers seem not to have grasped the possibility of utilizing theatrical news and gossip and criticism for "copy." They were still addressing readers whose main interests were politics and religion. The

<sup>5</sup> Compare with this the statement of Jean Cornand de la Crose, editor of *The Works of the Learned*, 1691-92, that "he could not mention works of light nature, 'plays, satyrs, Romances, and the like,' since they were 'fitter to corrupt men's morals, and to shake the ground of natural religion, than to promote learning and piety.'" Graham, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

*Daily Courant* did print occasionally as advertisements the hand-bills of the theatres. But Charles Gildon writes to his fictitious correspondent in Letter XLII of his *Post-Boy Robb'd of His Mail*, 1705-06, "I shall send you some Accounts at present, which the Publick Papers will not furnish you withal. And those are the present State of that Hospital of Parnassus, the Play-House." It appears from this that one should not expect the "public papers" to give news or criticism of the drama. The editors either ignored the theatre entirely or attacked with reforming zeal the whole institution of the drama and playhouse. Among the reformers who were also journalists were a Captain John Tutchin and Daniel Defoe.

John Tutchin was author of the *Observator*.<sup>6</sup> According to the *Catalogue of the Hope Collection*, "The *Observator* who is ever croaking in favour of piety and morality, fulminates in measureless discontent against plays, play-houses, and players." Tutchin appears to have roused the enmity of the players and dramatists to such a pitch that they attacked him in prologues and epilogues.<sup>7</sup> Tutchin replied to these attacks as though the quarrel were one of political opinion; it is probable that he had given offence by his "prohibitory maledictions against stage-plays published in his various papers for March, 1703."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>The *Observator*, No I, appeared on April 1, 1702. The paper continued twice weekly to No C, April 7, 1703; then Vol 2, No I, April 10, 1703, to No C, March 22, 1704. See the *Catalogue of Early Newspapers and Essayists, Contained in the Hope Collection in the Bodleian Library in Oxford*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>7</sup>Genest, John. *Some Account of the English Stage, from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830* 10 vols. Bath, 1832 "Lincoln's Inn Fields, October 5, 1703: Not acted 28 years, Sullen Lovers Sir Positive Atall, with a Prologue on the Death of the Royal Oak Lottery, and an epilogue on Maister Observator, by Powell Some person had evidently made his remarks on the Theatre under the name of Observator—the author of the Portsmouth Heiress 1704 in his preface calls the Observator, a most flagitious author of inspired dullness, the most worthless and impudent scribbler on earth"

<sup>8</sup>Graham, *op cit.*, 58-59.

Daniel Defoe in his *Weekly Review*,<sup>9</sup> 1704-13, now and then took the occasion of some event in the theatrical world to read a lecture upon the "unhappy circumstances that attend our theatres" and call upon his readers to rise and demand reforms. He saw in the playhouse and players a nucleus of the immoral elements in the society of London. Yet the degeneracy of the stage he attributed to the taste of the audiences. On June 20, 1706 (Vol III, No. 74, see also No. 76), the announcement of a performance for the benefit of a chapel led him to a scathing rebuke of that method of supporting the church. At another time<sup>10</sup> he was horrified that the players should be allowed to play in Oxford where they were sure to corrupt the minds of the youth. For, he said, "the Players know better than to act dull Sobriety on the Stage; abstract the leud and the prophane, there's not a Play now will bear acting, and if you should tye them down to do so, they must break and be undone." On October 26, 1706 (Vol. III, No. 128), he gave a summary of his objections against the playhouses. These attacks are, of course, the typical fruits of the moral revolt against the Restoration comedy, which found its most vigorous and characteristic expression in the prose of Jeremy Collier. They will be repeated all through the century either in leading articles or through "correspondence" in the periodical press. But such an attitude towards the whole institution of the theatre is obviously not friendly towards the development of a department of theatrical criticism in the newspapers.

It is significant that the journalist who next took up discussion of the theatres as part of his plan felt so differently from Defoe about the performance of the players at Oxford during the summer of 1706 that he wrote the Prologue<sup>11</sup> for it. When

<sup>9</sup> For the full title and the alterations in this *Review* during its life see H. R. Fox Bourne, *English Newspapers*, London, 1887, Vol I, p 62.

<sup>10</sup> August 8 and 20, 1706

<sup>11</sup> First published July 4, 1706, reprinted in *Muses' Mercury*, September, 1707. See an article by G. A. Aitken, "Actors and Managers under Queen Anne," *Athenaeum*, 1888, August 25, p. 268

Richard Steele began to publish the *Tatler*, on April 12, 1709, he had as one of his aims the very purpose which underlies the theatrical departments of modern newspapers. The periodical began as a series of reports from the coffee-houses. "Isaac Bickerstaff" was to go each week to each of the important coffee-houses about town and report the discussions which went on there.

All accounts of gallantry, pleasure, and entertainment, shall be under the article of White's Chocolate House; poetry, under that of Will's Coffee-house, learning, under the title of the Grecian; foreign and domestic news, you will have from St. James's Coffee-house, and what else I shall on any subject offer shall be dated from my own apartment

While this plan held, the letters from Will's Coffee-house reported at least once a week on the theatre. "Bickerstaff" announced new plays and benefit performances; he criticized plays and described actors in their parts; he championed the theatre as an institution for the betterment of men's minds and morals and at the same time denounced the abuse of the institution by the production of effeminate foreign opera and licentious plays. We have here the true beginning of theatrical journalism. But in No. 35, June 30, there came a break. The playhouses had closed for the summer. "Bickerstaff" announced:

Having taken a resolution, when plays are acted next winter by an entire good company, to publish observations from time to time on the performance of the actors, I think it but just to give an abstract of the law of action, for the help of the less learned part of the audience, that they may rationally enjoy so refined and instructive a pleasure as a just representation of human life.

The "abstract" is in fact Hamlet's advice to the players. Unfortunately the promise of regular criticism during the next season was not fulfilled. For in the meantime the form of the paper had somewhat changed. The paragraphs from the coffee-houses were gradually lengthened, and fewer could thus be printed in one issue. The papers took on more and more the form of the "essay" as we now know it. The reporting of the

news and fresh comment on recent experiences gave way to more formal literary compositions. Among the subjects dealt with, plays and players were still to be found; but instead of last night's play and the performance of it, we find essays on the powers of Betterton (No. 167), on the acting of Wilks and Cibber, and the pleasures of being in the audience (No. 182), and on the whole duty of audiences (No. 122, by Addison). Even in the earlier numbers there was a tendency to let the particular theatrical topic be merely the occasion for remarks of a more general nature on manners and morals. But with all modification Steele remains the first great writer to criticize in a periodical publication the current performances in the theatres.

None of the other periodicals with which Steele was connected was so much like a newspaper as was the *Tatler* in its early days. The *Spectator*, during its term of life, March 1, 1710/11 to December 6, 1712; June 18, 1714 to December 20, 1714, continued the later manner of the *Tatler*. Out of its six hundred and thirty-five papers only thirty-five either wholly or in part, directly or indirectly, concern themselves with theatrical or dramatic matters. All but a few of those which have to do with current performances were written by Steele. It was Steele who discussed the characters of the fine gentleman and lady as represented by Dorimant and Harriet Woodvil in Etherege's *Man of Mode* (Nos. 65 and 75). He also discussed farcical acting and the performance of Shadwell's *Lancashire Witches* (No. 141); he deplored the representation in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Scornful Lady* of a vicious priest (No. 270); he prepared the way for *The Distrest Mother*, by Ambrose Philips, by describing it and praising it ahead of time (No. 290), and likewise praised the performance in rehearsal of Colley Cibber's *Ximena, or The Heroic Daughter*, though he insinuated that Cibber was not quite honest in acknowledging how much he had got from Corneille (No. 546). Steele thus carried forward slightly his work as theatrical critic.

His next periodical, however, the *Guardian* (March 12, 1713, to October 1, 1713) devoted but six of its one hundred seventy-five numbers to subjects even remotely connected with the theatre. Among these are two essays on Addison's *Cato*. In No. XXXIII, April 18, 1713, on the moral values of that play, there occurs a significant remark which tells why the author has not given more papers to the criticism of the theatre: "Were it not that I speak on this Occasion, rather as a Guardian than a Critick, I could proceed to the Examination of the Justness of each Character." In the *Englishman*, October 6, 1713, to No. 57, February 15, 1714, sequel to the *Guardian*, politics absorbed all space and there are no articles dealing with the theatre. In the fifth number of *The Lover, by Marmaduke Myrtle, Gent.* (February 25, 1714, to May 27, 1714), is this promise.

As I have fixed my stand in the very Center of *Covent-Garden*, a Place for the last Century particularly famed for Wit and Love, and am near the Play-house, where one is represented every night by the other, I think I ought to be particularly careful of what passes in my neighbourhood; and as I am a profess'd Knight-Errant do all that lies in my power to make the Charming Endowment of Wit and the prevailing Passion of Love, subservient to the Interests of Honour and Virtue. . . . The two Theatres, and all the polite Coffee-houses, I shall constantly frequent, but principally the Coffee-house under my Lodge, Button's, and the Play-house in *Covent-Garden*.

But the succeeding papers contain no criticism nor news of theatrical performances.

*Town-Talk: In a series of Letters to a Lady in the Country* (No. I, December 17, 1715, to No. IX, February 13, 1716) was, however, a new departure in Steele's journalistic work. This series of letters was designed deliberately to help the theatre, with which Steele had now become connected as patentee. He discussed the stage as an agent for moral inspiration of the nation, and predicted that under the new patentee and the management by the players, the drama would become a great force for good. The paper is clearly meant to "puff" the new management and

therefore only incidentally criticizes the productions on the stage. It was followed by *Chit-Chat, addressed to the same Lady in the Country, etc.*, March 6, 1716, of which only two numbers appear to be extant. Neither of these contains theatrical criticism. His next periodical venture was the *Theatre, by Sir John Edgar*, the first number of which was published on January 2, 1720. The purpose of the paper was to undertake "the preservation and improvement of the English theatre." "Sir John Edgar" praised the profession of acting and praised the British stage as superior to any other in Europe at present and said, "It will not be the fault of the persons concerned in it if it does not arrive at as great Perfection as was ever known in Greece or Rome." Steele was at this time in the midst of a bitter quarrel with the Lord Chamberlain over the control of the theatre through his patent. Several numbers of the *Theatre* were used to lay his case before the public, and, after he had been defeated, to defend his character. Finally the paper trails off into discussion of the South Sea Bubble. The *Theatre* called forth answers. The *Anti-Theatre* (No. I, February 15, 1720, to No. XV, April 4, 1720) was more consistently concerned with theatrical affairs than was the *Theatre*; it demanded more liberty in the management and it made some remarks about the morality of certain performances. Beyond this it does not venture into criticism. A "Sir Andrew Artlove, Kt. and Bart" sent letters to the editors of *Applebee's Original Weekly Journal* which were intended to be "full Consideration and Confutation of Sir John Edgar in his Paper call'd the THEATRE."<sup>12</sup> In a series of essays called the *Muses' Gazette*, which also appeared in *Applebee's Journal* (March 12, 1720, to July 9, 1720), are to be found other references to the struggle between Steele and the Lord Chamberlain, one of which mentions numerous other replies to the *Theatre*, probably pamphlets. All these papers represent the journalism of theatrical politics rather than of dramatic art. Not since the *Tatler*

<sup>12</sup> These letters were reprinted in Nichols's edition of the *Theatre* in 1791.

and occasional essays in the *Spectator* had Steele seriously given himself to criticism of the performances of the theatres. It is to those early essays alone then that we must look for the qualities of his critical work, before we study the other periodicals of the second and third decades to see whether any one else had taken the hint which he had dropped.

In an age when most critics of the drama were tied down by a rigid set of literary "rules," Steele was remarkable for his insistence upon the pragmatic test. He knew that a play must be judged not in the study but in the theatre. In the preface to his own play, *The Conscious Lovers*,<sup>13</sup> he thanked the actors for their excellent portrayal of the characters and stated his fear that when the play was read much of the vitality of those characters would not appear. Yet he declared

that it must be remember'd, a Play is to be seen, and is made to be Represented with the Advantage of Action, nor can appear but with half the Spirit, without it; for the greatest Effect of a Play in reading is to excite the Reader to go see it; and when he does so, it is then a Play has the Effect of Example and Precept.

When he criticized other men's plays, he was careful to distinguish between the work of the dramatist and the work of the actors. Yet when he found that the merit of a play lay rather in what an excellent actor had made of a meager part than in the words themselves, he was still willing to praise this as a legitimate combination. At the same time that he recognized what was done for a play by the actors and the theatrical setting (including the audience), he was willing to grant that that theatrical effect was worth study and deserved proper appreciation. He was not to be fooled into confusing the work of the dramatist with that of the player, nor was he, on the other hand, to be drawn into petty scoffing at the player's art. He had a high opinion of that art and grieved that the intelligent men who practiced it were often called upon to debase their understandings by

<sup>13</sup> *The Conscious Lovers*, 4th Edition, 1733, Preface

performances in such plays as Ravenscroft's *London Cuckolds*, which he called "a heap of vice and absurdity" and in which the players were "obliged to repeat and assume proper gestures for representing things of which their reason must be ashamed, and which they must disdain their audience for approving." He nowhere discussed fully his theory of acting. We have seen that when he wished to set forth the principles upon which acting should be judged, he fell back upon the advice of Hamlet to the players. In his own criticism he tried to follow Shakespeare's comprehensive principles. His respect for the actor's art was part of his general respect for the institution of the theatre and a corollary to his own enthusiastic enjoyment of play-going. *Tatler* No. 182 is a glowing defense of what may seem to others his excessive discourse about the theatre. He expresses his delight at merely being one among so varied a crowd of people as the audience brings together. The pleasures of watching excellent representations of human life are just so much additional profit. And then he gives the creed of the perfect theatrical critic:

. . . who is not excessive in the discourse of what he extremely likes? Eugenio can lead you to a gallery of fine pictures, which collection he is always increasing Crassus, through woods and forests, to which he designs to add the neighbouring counties These are great and noble instances of magnificence The players are my pictures, and their scenes my territories By communicating the pleasure I take in them, it may in some measure add to men's gratifications this way, as viewing the choice and wealth of Eugenio and Crassus augments the enjoyments of those whom they entertain, with a prospect of such possessions as would not otherwise fall within the reach of their fortunes *It is a very good office one man does another, when he tells him the manner of his being pleased;* and I have often thought, that a comment upon the capacities of the players would very much improve the delight that way, and impart it to those who otherwise have no sense of it.

In telling of the pleasure he got from the theatre, Steele showed that his taste ranged far. The man who learns his literature and especially drama only in the study will find it more

difficult to adapt himself to the “lively arts” which are practised in the popular theatre and in the popular magazines and newspapers. Steele had some dislikes and held to them consistently. He was no lover of the opera, because, he explained, “the understanding has no part in the pleasure,” which is indeed “the shallow satisfaction of eyes and ears only.” He frequently bantered the puppet showmen, though his manner suggests a secret child-like affection for Punch. Of the pantomime artists, Bullock and Pinkethman, he has left an inimitably humorous parallel description which shows a robust delight in rough-and-tumble for its own sake. He despised, however, the tendency to put in tumbling, rope-walking, and other vaudeville stunts between the acts of serious drama. Such a combination he thought infinitely below the level even of opera, where there was at least some attempt at harmony. Steele also drew parallels between the powers of the greater actors of his time, as for example his parallel between Wilks and Cibber (*Tatler* No. 182). Such parallels were to be very common in the criticism of the later years of the century, and tended to be lifeless analyses and ticketing of the powers of the actors rather than vivid descriptions which might give to us some sense of the effect which the performances had upon the spectators. Steele, however, surpassed his successors in his ability occasionally to describe the actor so as to move the reader with some of the actor’s own power. The greatest example of this is his essay on the funeral of Thomas Betterton (*Tatler* No. 167), in which “Bickerstaff” reviewed the parts in which he could remember Betterton:

I have hardly a notion that any performer of antiquity could surpass the action of Mr. Betterton in any of the occasions in which he has appeared on our stage. The wonderful agony which he appeared in when he examined the circumstance of the handkerchief in *Othello*; the mixture of love that intruded upon his mind, upon the innocent answers Desdemona makes, betrayed in his gestures such a variety and vicissitude of passions, as would admonish a man to be afraid of his own heart; and perfectly convince him, that it is to stab it, to

admit that worst of daggers, jealousy. Whoever reads in his closet this admirable scene, will find that he cannot, except he has as warm an imagination as Shakespeare himself, find any but dry, incoherent, and broken sentences, but a reader that has seen Betterton act it, observes, there could not be a word added, that longer speeches had been unnatural, nay, impossible, in Othello's circumstances. The charming passage in the same tragedy, where he tells the manner of winning the affections of his mistress, was urged with so moving and graceful an energy, that, while I walked in the cloisters, I thought of him with the same concern as if I waited for the remains of a person, who had in real life done all that I had seen him represent. The gloom of the place and faint lights before the ceremony appeared, contributed to the melancholy disposition I was in and I began to be extremely afflicted, that Brutus and Cassius had any difference; that Hotspur's gallantry was so unfortunate, and that the mirth and good humour of Falstaff could not exempt him from the grave. Nay, this occasion, in me who look upon the distinctions amongst men to be scenical, raised reflections upon the emptiness of all human perfection and greatness in general, and I could not but regret that the sacred heads which lie buried in the neighbourhood of this little portion of the earth, in which my poor old friend is deposited, are returned to dust as well as he, and that there is no difference in the grave between the imaginary and the real monarch.

In his criticism of plays Steele was likely to stress the moral effect or the power to raise tears. He wrote his own plays to support Jeremy Collier and the other reformers and to emphasize the virtues of kindness and sympathy. In his essays he wrote vigorous complaints against the "luscious way" of writing, which he found in Mrs. Behn's *The Rover*, in Mrs. Pix's *Ibrahim*, and in Etherege's *She Would If She Could*. He found grievous fault with Etherege for his treatment of the character of Dorimant in *The Man of Mode* (*Spectator* No. 65). Yet he was so good a critic that even Horner in Wycherley's *Country Wife* did not provoke his wrath, but brought a clear defense on the grounds of its historical truth. Although he could not absolve Wycherley and others from the charge of too great leniency in letting such vicious people go unscathed in the dénouements of their plays,

he recognized the vast difference between the great Restoration comic writers and the “mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease” in his own day. Ben Jonson, however, was his chief enthusiasm in comedy, and he ridiculed the failure of his contemporaries to approach Jonson in the proper distinguishing of character through speech and action as well as costume. In his judgment of the tragedies of his day he was as trenchant as the authors of *The Rehearsal*. He ridiculed their ready-made plots, their copy-book sententiousness, and their empty pageantry. In his criticism of Shakespeare it was characteristic of him to lay most stress upon the pathetic parts and even to make them more tearful by his own writing. His great attribute was that he could feel his way into the character’s situation as though he were the actor. Not only have we seen vividly the way Wilks acted Macduff or Betterton Othello, but we have felt more keenly some aspects of the many-sided life of those characters as Shakespeare created them. In pointing out the differences between contemporary writers of tragedy and Shakespeare his diagnosis of the faults of the newer tragedy as it was and as it was to develop for a century could not have been more correct had he had before him the scores of such plays written after he had given the warning. In spite of his sound criticism, tragic writers continued to portray their characters as strangely passive spectators of fictitious battles between “passions” within their souls, who then in unruffled sentences would describe these battles for their hearers. Steele distinguished between the true tragic passion and the spurious:

[No. 47]. . . . Tragical passion was the subject of the discourse where I last visited this evening; and a gentleman who knows that I am at present writing a very deep tragedy, directed his discourse in a particular manner to me. “It is the common fault,” said he, “of you gentlemen who write in the buskin style, that you give us rather the sentiments of such who behold tragic events, than of such who bear a part in them themselves. I would advise all who pretend this way to read Shakespeare with care; and they will soon be deterred

from putting forth what is usually called tragedy. The way of common writers in this kind is rather the description than the expression of sorrow. There is no medium in these attempts, and you must go to the very bottom of the heart, or it is all mere language; and the writer of such lines is no more a poet, than a man is a physician for knowing the names of distempers, without the causes of them."

"Bickerstaff" said that then he turned to Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, read the lines spoken by Northumberland when he saw the messenger who was bringing the news of Hotspur's death, and then gave up the thought of writing tragedy. Even in his criticism of Shakespeare, as in the essay on Betterton already quoted, it is significant that Steele frequently identified the characters with the actors who impersonated them. His criticism of the drama everywhere, even when it arose not in a report of a current performance but merely from reflection upon Shakespeare, showed that it was the fresh criticism of a spectator, sensitive to all the minor elements of theatrical production—lights, music, and scenery—and sensitive also to the presence of a crowd of other men all round him, making him for the time sink the critic and the scholar in the man.

The effect of the *Tatler* upon the tastes and manners of its readers has been vigorously attested to by contemporaries, most pointedly by John Gay in *The Present State of Wit*, 1711. The effect of the papers which dealt with the theatre is described by Colley Cibber in two places in his writings. At no time is it easy to get evidence about the influence upon the theatre of the strictures published in newspapers; hence such clear evidence as this deserves emphasis. Cibber dedicated to Sir Richard Steele his tragedy, *Ximena, or the Heroick Daughter*, 1719. In the Dedication he said,

While the World was under the daily Correction and Authority of your Lucubrations, their influence on the Public was not more visible in any one instance, than the sudden Improvement (I might say Reformation) of the Stage, that immediately followed them: From whence it is now apparent that many Papers (which the Grave and

Severe then thought were thrown away upon that Subject), were, in your speaking to the Theatre, still advancing the same Work, and instructing the same World in Miniature; to the end, that whenever you thought fit to be silent, the Stage, as you had amended it, might, by a kind of substituted Power, continue to Posterity, your peculiar Manner of making the Improvement of their Minds their publick Diversion

Nothing but a Genius so universally revered could, with such Candour and Penetration, have pointed out its Faults and Misconduct, and so effectually have redeem'd its Uses and Excellence from Prejudice and Disfavour. How often have we known the most elegant Audiences drawn together at a Day's Warning, by the Influence or Warrant of a single *Tatler*, in a Season, when our best Endeavours without it, could not defray the Charge of the Performance? This powerful and innocent Artifice soon recover'd us into Fashion, and spirited us up to think such new Favour of our Auditors worthy of our utmost Industry, and 'tis to that Industry so instructed, the Stage now owes its Reputation and Prosperity . . . How much you have done for us was visible to all the World, what Sense we have of it is yet known to few, I therefore take this Occasion to make our Acknowledgments if possible as publick as our Obligations.

In his *Apology* Cibber makes a similar reference:<sup>14</sup>

We knew, too, the Obligations the Stage had to his Writings; there being scarce a Comedian of Merit in our whole Company whom his *Tatlers* had not made better by his publick Recommendations of them. And many Days had our House been particularly fill'd by the Influence and Credit of his Pen.

Joseph Addison's comments on the contemporary theatre in the *Spectator* are contained in essays on general topics; he did not at any time undertake to review a new play nor a recent performance. He gives here and there, however, a tribute to some performer or a vivid glimpse of some aspect of the theatre of his time. He stands as a bitter opponent of the Italian opera because he finds it offends common sense. He declares that its "only design is to gratify the senses and keep up indolent attention in the audience." While one should not look for anything

<sup>14</sup> *An Apology for the Life of Mr Colley Cibber, Comedian Written by himself* 1740 (Ed. by R. W. Lowe, 1889), Vol II, p. 162.

but nonsense in the words, he is pained to find that what little meaning the Italian had conveyed through words and music has been spoiled in the translation into English. He attacks the custom of singing part of the opera in English and part in Italian; and is patriotically indignant at the English audience which will choose to listen to a nonsensical opera in a foreign tongue rather than to an English tragedy so good as his friend Edmund Smith's *Phaedra and Hippolitus*. He is not, however, incapable of recording his appreciation of the bearing and histionic powers of Signor Nicolino Grimaldi ("Nicolini") who had "shewn us the Italian Musick in its Perfection" and who could well be taken by English tragic actors as a model of stage deportment. One of the papers about opera has some shrewd remarks to make about stage illusion: it complains of the false art which combines with painted scenery certain realistic effects like a flock of real sheep, or a real boat on a painted cloth sea.<sup>15</sup> He shows a fine critical sense in his discussion of the principles of the recitative in opera, when he attacks the stupidity of English imitators of the Italian in that they do not keep the tone and rhythm of their recitative close to the natural tones and rhythm of the language as the Italians have done.

The other diversions which sometimes in Addison's day were crowding out the legitimate drama met with his ridicule. He summed up his laughter at them in a paper which introduced a "projector" who proposed to save the visitors to London the trouble of going from place to place to see all the kinds of show by concocting an entertainment called "The Expedition of Alexander the Great." Into this entertainment would be woven the performances of the dancing monkeys, the puppets, Punch and Judy, the opera, rope dancers, and all the rest. At the close of a letter in another paper which offers a monkey rope dancer as a counter attraction to puppet shows and opera, Addison writes,<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> See *Spectator*, Nos 5, 13, 18, 29, and 405 for these views of opera

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Nos 28 and 31.

I will not say that a Monkey is a better Man than some of the Opera Heroes, but certainly he is a better Representative of a Man than the most artificial Composition of Wood and Wire.

Addison enjoyed making fun of the conventions of the theatre. That a man should play the part of a lion in a serious drama struck him as funny. He jested at the plumes which the heroes in tragedy always wore, and at the long trains of the heroines which necessitated train-bearers who cluttered up the stage. He laughed at the artificially produced lightning and thunder, the too palpable ghosts, the handkerchiefs for pathetic scenes, and the use of the mother-and-child tear-getter, and at many other devices in tragedy and comedy.

His judgments of the contemporary English drama are few. His papers on tragedy are well known for their modifications of the neo-classic doctrines. It is enough to remind the reader here of the attack on poetic justice, the attack on trag-i-comedy and the double plot in tragedy, the scorn of "rant," and the declaration of preference for the works of great genius, like Shakespeare, who was utterly ignorant of "the Rules of Art," over the works of a man of little genius who wrote by the "rules." He thought Nathaniel Lee perhaps the modern English writer with most of the true tragic spirit in him, but complained of his lack of restraint. He praised Thomas Otway's tragedies and truly characterized their pathetic and domestic qualities.<sup>17</sup> The only contemporary play which he judged was Ambrose Philips's *Distrest Mother*, a version of Racine's *Andromaque*. This play was systematically puffed by Steele and Addison and was the play which Sir Roger de Coverley and the Spectator went to see.<sup>18</sup> The play is, however, merely praised for its general excellence, not reviewed. Addison was strongly opposed to the tone of the Restoration comedy on the grounds of its immorality.<sup>19</sup>

Lastly it may be added that Addison had some strong things

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Nos. 39 and 40.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Nos. 290 and 335.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 446.

to say against the spirit of criticism of his day which preyed upon the work of contemporary authors as though nothing could ever again be written which would compare with the Ancients. The objects of this attack were chiefly John Dennis and his sort of pedantic criticism. His ridicule of these critics will be appropriate for many a journalistic theatrical critic for a good many years after it was written:

The Words, Unity, Action, Sentiment, and Diction, pronounced with an Air of Authority, give them a Figure among the unlearned Readers, who are apt to believe they are very deep, because they are unintelligible.<sup>20</sup>

In the periodicals of the type of the *Spectator* there was an essay here and there upon the drama or upon the conduct of the theatre. The *Female Tatler*, by Mrs. Crackenthorpe, a *Lady that knows everything* (No. I, July 8, 1709, to No. CXI, March 31, 1710), one of the earliest imitators of the *Tatler*, devoted her sixth paper to ridicule of the attempts of the actors to get larger salaries, of the airs they put on, and of their consorting with nobility. The *Weekly Observator* (Nos. I to XI, May to July, 1716) No. V, carried a general condemnation of the characters of audiences, of love tragedies, of stage oaths, of abuse of the clergy on the stage, of the immorality of comedy, and so forth. The *Entertainer, containing Remarks upon Men, Manners, Religion, and Policy, etc.* (November 6, 1717, to August 27, 1718) attacked in No. VIII Colley Cibber's play, *The Non-Juror*, chiefly on religious and political grounds. The *Casuist*,<sup>21</sup> No. IV, December 16, 1719, included a laudatory criticism of Southerne's *Spartan Dame* and especially of Wilks's performance in it. The *Weekly Medley, or The Gentleman's Recreation* (July 26, 1718, to No. 79, January 23, 1720) contains in No.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 592

<sup>21</sup> *The Casuist, or a Dialogue between Pasquin and Marforio, Concerning Men and Things: By a Society of Gentlemen* (MS note in copy in Hope Collection: "Mr. Tolson of Lincoln's Inn") No. I, November 25, 1719, to No. XV, March 2, 1720

76, January 2, 1720, an attack, chiefly on political grounds, upon Cibber and Nicholas Rowe. In the *Weekly Packet* there appeared a series of essays called "The Humorist: being Essays on Several Subjects, with a Dedication to the Man in the Moon," and written by Thomas Gordon, which contained some essays on theatrical subjects the most interesting was a "recipe" for modern dramatic criticisms, a burlesque of pamphlet criticism of drama, poking fun at the conventional use of terms from Aristotle, *An Essay on Poetry* by the Earl of Mulgrave, and *The Rehearsal* by the Duke of Buckingham and others; in another essay, a review of A. Philips's *Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester*, the author declared his own critical method to be not that of "rules," but of search for "nervous sense and bold thoughts." Mrs. Eliza Haywood in the *Tea-Table*<sup>22</sup> made frequent comments upon matters connected with the stage; but one cannot always be sure that her stage criticisms, dealing with the managers chiefly, are not veiled attacks upon the political leaders of the day. In the *Plain-Dealer*,<sup>23</sup> No. 31, July 6, 1724, the writer made a promise about regular criticisms of the theatre which, like many others who did the same throughout the century, he never fulfilled.

I come now [he writes], to say a word or two in my own person to the Stages Much of the Summer is yet before us; and Winter, being the Season of our Theatrical Campaigning, I shall prepare myself against that Time, to take the Field, at their first Marching, and move with one or other of the Bodies, during the whole Course of their Operations My Readers may then expect to be entertained from my private Journal, with the Good or Bad Discipline of both Armies and the Personal Conduct of their Generals in the Exercises, Evolutions, Sallies, Stratagems, or Engagements, they shall at any Time be concern'd in . . . Let 'em therefore stand warn'd: and in-

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<sup>22</sup> The *Tea-Table*, No 1, February 21, to No 36, June 22, 1724

<sup>23</sup> The *Plain-Dealer*, No I, March 23, 1724, to No CXVII, May 7, 1725  
The authors are said to have been Aaron Hill, W. Bond, and Richard Savage.

sure themselves that I shall animadvert on their Behaviour with a Frankness they have been little used to; and lay 'em open like a PLAIN DEALER

When winter comes, however, he very seldom "animadverts" on plays and players. In No. 59, October 12, 1724, he ironically greets with enthusiasm the setting up of a new puppet show and pretends to see in it a renascence of public taste, and in No. 94, he greets with real joy the announcement of the restoration of English opera to compete with the Italian. But the writer scarcely can be said to have fulfilled his promise.

A somewhat similar story is to be told of a more distinguished essay series, the *Censor*,<sup>24</sup> by Lewis Theobald, 1715 and 1717. The *Censor* professed to be heir to the critical position of Ben Jonson and promised to have "a particular regard to the Stage." "I shall," he wrote in No. VII, "(whenever disposed to Criticisms of this kind) consider it with Relation to the Merits or Defaults of the Pieces perform'd, or Persons performing them. By which Method I shall have it in my Power to entertain the Town with the Beauties or Defects in *Writing*, as well as the Graces or Imperfections in *Action*." Then he gave a criticism of *King Lear*. Not until No. 36 did he again mention the theatre. In No. 39 he promised that every Saturday his paper would be devoted to the theatre and drama, but he did not keep his promise, the references to these topics being very few and far between.

Although Lewis Theobald did not carry out his promises to write about the current theatrical performances, he does say in his essays in the *Censor* some interesting things about the drama, which seem to have come from his experience as a frequenter of the theatre and not merely as a reader of plays in

<sup>24</sup> The *Censor* was published in *Mist's Weekly Journal, or Saturday's Post*; also in separate sheets, three times a week. No I appeared on April 11, 1715; No XXX on June 17, 1715. A new series began on January 1, 1717, and ran to No XCVI, May 30, 1717.

his study. He writes in No. 87 on the decay of dramatic genius in his day, and upon the general principles of acting. He emphasizes the importance of good acting to bring out a play and also to enforce good conduct and ideals in the populace. He sees a need for more education for actors, to fit them for this high purpose. He then urges on his readers the complementary need for more honor to the profession; he is one of the many defenders of the actors against the moralistic critics and urges that the public should aid the actor in his attempt to take his profession seriously by ceasing to assume that all actors are on a lower moral plane. In No. 93 he discusses some of the faults in audiences. He finds them likely to be influenced by political feeling or by personal feeling towards the actor, manager, or playwright, and so to distort the whole meaning of a play. He finds them open to all sorts of trivial interests that are not important in dramatic criticism. He scorns their love of fustian poetry. On the other hand he is willing to admit the force of an audience's judgment of a play in the theatre. For in No. 70 he sets out to discuss Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, which he finds to be held "in the fairest Esteem and Admiration," and adds, "I do not reckon from the Vulgar, tho' they, where their Passions are concern'd, are certainly no ill Judges."

In his criticism of plays Theobald shows that he is most concerned with the moral effect of drama, though he also brings to bear all the "rules" about technical structure. He draws practical "morals" from *King Lear*, particularly from the episodes of Edmund and Edgar. He shows himself a man of his time by preferring the Nahum Tate ending of *Lear* in which Lear and Cordelia are left alive. He claims that the "absurdities" which one finds in *Lear* are due to ignorance of the mechanical rules of drama, but are pardonable because of the excellences elsewhere to be found. In No. 63 he says,

The Contradictions and Extravagances, which are so common in our *English* Tragedies, might reasonably make their Audience and

Readers suppose, that the Authors wrote without Rule or Design, without Regard either to Reason or Judgment, or any View to Probability or Decency.

Yet he is willing to make excuses for Shakespeare (No. 70):

As to particular Irregularities, it is not to be expected that a Genius like *Shakespeare's* should be judged by the Laws of *Aristotle*, and the other Prescribers to the Stage; it will be sufficient to fix a Character of Excellence to his Performances, if there are in them a Number of beautiful Incidents, true and exquisite Turns of Nature and Passion, fine and delicate Sentiments, uncommon Images, and great Boldness of Expression.

Again in a defense of Æschylus (No. 60) he declares a preference for the “sublime irregular” over the “exact mediocre.”

Like any other theatrical critic Theobald soon found himself greatly interested in the characters of the plays. In these few essays in the *Censor* there are two interesting character studies, one of Lear and the other of Othello, which show real sensitiveness beyond the power of the usual “moral” or “regular” critic. Of Othello he says (No. 36):

I have frequently perus'd with Satisfaction the *Othello* of *Shakespear*, a Play most faulty and irregular in many Points, but Excellent in one particular. For the Crimes and Misfortunes of the Moor are owing to an impetuous Desire of having his Doubts clear'd, and a Jealousie and Rage, native to him, which he cannot controul and which push him on to Revenge. He is otherwise in his Character brave and open, generous and full of Love for Desdemona; but stung with the subtle Suggestions of Iago, and impatient of a Wrong done to his Love and Honour, Passion at once overbears his Reason, and gives him up to Thoughts of bloody Reparation: yet after he has determin'd to murder his Wife, his Sentiments of her suppos'd Injury, and his Misfortune are so pathetick, that we cannot but forget his barbarous Resolution, and pity the Agonies which he so strongly seems to feel.

In tragic characters Theobald looks for a mixture of vices and virtues, and takes for the great example of the tragic hero, the Œdipus of Sophocles.

We may now deal briefly with the remaining essay papers of

the first thirty years of the century. Erasmus Philips in the opening explanation to the *Country Gentleman* (No. 1, March 11, 1726, to No. 84, December 26, 1726) hints that he will discuss drama, but the first and only mention of it is in No. 49, when he answers a correspondent's demand for reformation in the theatre by saying pessimistically that he does not believe farce, song, and dance can be eradicated. James Ralph, friend of Fielding and Benjamin Franklin, in the Preface to the *Touch-Stone*, 1728, a series of essays on "the reigning diversions of the town," claims to be the famous "Trunk-maker" whom Addison had described<sup>25</sup> as leader of the tastes of the upper gallery. His essays deal with the general problems of the stage, laughing at some of the glaring absurdities in opera and tragedy and sentimental comedy, with the hope that some remedies may be found. Jonathan Swift, in the *Intelligencer* (No. 1, July 29, 1728, to No. 22, December 23, 1728), No. 3, writes "A Vindication of Mr. Gay and The Beggar's Opera." With those which came after 1730 we shall deal a little later.

Some account must now be given of the writing about the theatres which is occasionally to be found in the ordinary newspapers, daily, thrice a week, and weekly, during the first thirty years of the century. Most of these papers were, like the essay papers, slow to take much continuous interest in the drama. After the success of the *Daily Courant*, beginning in 1702, there commenced a remarkable increase in the number of newspapers. In spite of the efforts of the government, by the Stamp Tax and by many prosecutions, to curb this kind of expression of public opinion and spread of news, the newspapers became more and more widely circulated. In 1711 there were "published weekly about 44,000 newspapers, viz. *Daily Courant*, *London Post*, *English Post*, *London Gazette*, *Postman*, *Postboy*, *Flying Post*, *Review*, and *Observator*."<sup>26</sup> In 1714 the number had increased

<sup>25</sup> The *Spectator*, No. 235, November 29, 1711.

<sup>26</sup> "A Proposition to Increase the Revenue of the Stamp-Office," Reding-

considerably and included issues of the *Daily Courant*, *Evening Post*, *Examiner*, *Flying Post*, *British Mercury*, *Lay-Monk*, Oldisworth's *Examiner*, Harrison's *Weekly Journal*, *Controller*, *Monitor*, *British Merchant*, *Mercator*, and *Weekly Packet*. The list of names increases with every year from now on. The list of those which admit any sort of discussion of the theatre is, however, very much shorter. A search of the files of these newspapers through the first thirty years of the century has yielded only the essays and correspondence which will now be discussed.

Although the aim of these newspapers was primarily the dissemination of news and political information, they did admit occasionally as leading articles essays on some event in the theatre or correspondence from gentlemen who claimed, rightly or wrongly, not to be officially connected with the paper. It usually required some stirring event like the production of Steele's *Conscious Lovers* (November 7, 1722) or that of Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (January 29, 1728) to induce the publishers to give over their sheets to discussion of drama, and then chiefly because the matters had become subjects for public controversy and therefore, as modern journalists might say, had definite "circulation-value."

We have seen already<sup>27</sup> that *Applebee's Weekly Journal* in 1720 opened its pages to replies to Sir Richard Steele's defense of himself and his associates in the conduct of Drury Lane Theatre. The chief newspaper enemy of the managers of Drury Lane was Nathaniel Mist of *Mist's Weekly Journal, or Saturday's Post*. Cibber has recorded<sup>28</sup> that for fifteen years after the production of *The Non-Juror* (1717) this journal "scarce ever failed of passing some of his party compliments upon me.

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ton, *Calendar of Treasury Papers*, 1708-1714, p 235 Quoted in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, article by Hugh Chisholm, "Newspapers, 2. British Newspapers"

<sup>27</sup> See above, p 41

<sup>28</sup> *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber*, 1740, Chap XV

The state and the stage were his frequent parallels, and the minister and mynheer Keiber the manager were as constantly drolled upon." On February 2, 1723, the journal attacked the actor-manager system, ridiculed Cibber's acting in tragedy, and scoffed at the shabby costumes and scenery at Drury Lane. On March 9 and March 16 it returned to the attack upon the managers. On April 6 a leading article praised a pantomime at the rival theatre, obviously as an occasion to decry the Italian opera at Drury Lane. On December 12, 1724, some general remarks on tragedy led to an attack on Cibber's *Heroick Daughter*. One week later the attack was continued, this time upon Cibber's poetic style and language. Then on January 2, 1725, Cibber's new play, *Caesar in Egypt*, was condemned. Even after the paper had been renamed *Fog's Weekly Journal* it contained the same sort of criticism, for on March 15, 1729, we find an attack on Cibber, called "Keyber," and his associates, particularly referring to some disreputable aspects of theatre life. Other newspapers were occasionally led to the same attacks. The *Universal Journal*, March 25, 1724, printed a letter from a correspondent complaining of the state of degradation of the stage, which he understood was the reason why Edward Young had postponed the performance of his tragedy, *The Brothers*. In *Pasquin*, No. 105 (February, 1724), "Menander" wrote to suggest an impartial court of appeal to which poets might carry their cause against the managers who refused plays. A letter signed "Momus" in the *London Journal* of April 3, 1725, sounded a lament over the state of the theatres and sneered at the proprietors. *Read's Weekly Journal, or the British Gazetteer* throughout the year 1726 printed occasional letters on the management and on other theatrical matters, but no criticism of plays.

The production of Steele's play, *The Conscious Lovers*, November 7, 1722, brought forth a great deal of newspaper dis-

cussion. For *Mist's Weekly Journal* this event was but one more occasion for war upon Cibber and Steele. After the editor had read the play in published form, he wrote an ironical account of it (January 19, 1723). He professed to approve of the "new invention" by which sermons are "work'd up into Comedies," and suggested that the Bible be ransacked for plots of such plays. In the *St. James's Journal*, No. 29, November 15, 1722, there appeared, dated from "Button's, Monday, November 12, 1722," "A Short Defense of two Excellent Comedies, viz. *Sir Fopling Flutter*, and *The Conscious Lovers*; in answer to many scandalous Reflections, on them both, by a certain terrible *Critick*, who never saw the latter, and scarce knows anything of Comedy at all." This was a reply to a pamphlet by John Dennis, a reply which merely laughed Dennis and his pretensions out of court. On November 22, the same journal published a letter signed "Dormant," criticizing in mild, good-tempered terms *The Conscious Lovers*, and giving a sympathetic eulogy of the character and fortunes of Steele. "Dormant," who almost certainly was Alexander Pope,<sup>29</sup> wrote again on December 8, this time speaking particularly of the preface to the published play. Once he was set on the way of theatrical criticism, however, the author wrote of other plays than Steele's. In his second letter he praised Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster* as acted by Wilks; and in a third letter on December 15 he took a superior attitude towards those who disagreed with him about that play, promising to "take an opportunity to justify (the play) as to the Fable, Sentiments, and Diction, when I have nothing better to entertain you with," and asking disdainfully why his reputation for wisdom should rise or fall at Button's coffee-house according as he approved or condemned any particular play. Not until April 20, 1723, did "Dormant"

<sup>29</sup> See Cobb, Margaret E. "Pope's Lines on Atticus." *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 36, 1921, p. 348.

write again about plays. Here he expressed the hope that English audiences would cherish genius when they found it, declared that Ambrose Philips had improved Racine's *Andromaque* in his *Distrest Mother*, and puffed the coming performance of *The Fatal Legacy* by Mrs. J. Robe.<sup>30</sup> These are the meager contributions of Pope to English theatrical criticism. The most vigorous articles about *The Conscious Lovers* appeared, however, in the *Freeholder's Journal*. This journal carried no criticism of the theatre from its first number on January 31, 1721/22 until No. XXXIX, September 26, 1722. In that number we find a letter, under the caption, "Will's Coffee-House, Covent Garden," which is merely a puff of the comedy, *The Artifice*, by a tried author, Mrs. Centlivre, to be produced on October 2. But on October 31 (No. XLV) the leading essay in the journal, signed "Upsilon," discusses the conception of the gentleman and points to the promise of a new play as the occasion for his remarks. *The Conscious Lovers* was produced on November 7. Consequently, on November 14 appeared a vigorously written essay "From my own Apartment," expressing dissatisfaction with Steele's picture of the fine gentleman, which picture he considered the whole design of the play. He compared the play unfavorably with Terence's *Andria*. Yet he approved the duel scene. The next week a letter from "Tom Touchy" sneered at Steele's "plagiary" from Terence. On November 28 the leading article was again given over to discussion of the play. This paper was one of the best specimens of journalistic criticism of the age. The author found the characters in the play monsters entirely out of nature; he thought the play was saved entirely by its "sanctity," which he sneered at; he ridiculed the sentimentality and the gallery-play in the Tom and Phillis episode; and finally he ridiculed the attempt to associate such stuff with so high a source as Terence and preferred to see the source of the story in "the ancient and delightful ballad of the *Bristol*

<sup>30</sup> Produced at the new Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, April 23, 1723.

*Merchant*,” particularly since ballads, specifically *Chevy Chase*, had already been considered worthy of elaborate criticism by this author in his *Spectator*.<sup>31</sup> This attack upon Steele drew out his friend Benjamin Victor, who published on November 29, *An Epistle to Sir Richard Steele, On his Play, call'd, The Conscious Lovers*. The *Freeholder's Journal*, December 5 (No. L), continued the war by attacking this *Epistle* and Steele's Preface to his play. The writer found fault with the style of the Preface and sneered at the vanity he found there, he ridiculed the statement that “any Thing that has its Foundation in Happiness and Finess [sic] must be allow'd to be the Subject of Comedy”, and he made a vigorous, and certainly sound, protest against the new kind of tearful comedy which was invading the English stage. In his next paper he returned to the attack, this time taking up particularly the provocative prologue and the epilogue. Then there was an end to the discussion, and no more theatrical criticism throughout the run of the paper, which closed with No. LXXVI, May 18, 1723.

We can trace through these early decades some gropings after the regular theatrical department. The *Tatler* in 1709, as we have said, had it. Theobald, in the *Censor*, 1715 and 1717, seemed to remember that he ought to have such a section, but could not fulfill his promises. Pope, in the letters just referred to, in the *St. James's Journal*, 1722-23, wrote from Button's Coffee-House after the manner of “Isaac Bickerstaff”; and indeed in the first of those letters (November 15, 1722) after disclaiming any attempt to gain fame or money by writing, he said, “But, if I should ever trouble you again, it will be no Answer to him, I assure you; but, perhaps, general and particular *Remarks*, on *Plays* and *Actors*: since I happen to be part of the Audience, almost every Night.” Yet he wrote, at most, three times more. In No. 75 of *Pasquin* (No. 1, November 28, 1722, to No. 119,

<sup>31</sup> Of course it is well known now that the papers on *Chevy Chase* were written by Addison, not Steele.

March 26, 1724), a correspondent, "Menander," writes to offer himself as a substitute for "Pasquin" in the business of theatrical critic as he is a devotee of the stage in all its branches. He then criticizes Farquhar's *Inconstant*, and follows this at quite an interval with a paper (No. 105) on the management, on the taste for pantomime and opera, and in praise of *The Captives* by John Gay. In No. 109, however, we find a report significantly headed "Covent Garden" as though it were a regular thing to send letters from the playhouse district. This is a formal critique of *The Fatal Constancy* by Sir Hildebrand Jacob, which was revived at Drury Lane on February 12, 1724; it also includes some remarks on the entertainment, *The Loves of Mars and Venus*, as produced by niggardly managers. No. 113 (March 3, 1723/4) contained a letter on opera. The paper closes with No. 119, on March 26, 1724, having printed no more discussions of drama or theatre. *Mist's Weekly Journal*, No. 223, February 2, 1723, declares the intention of giving its readers an essay on the theatre once in a while. An occasional essay is printed during March and April, but in No. 267, December 7, 1723, the editor writes,

It is now a considerable Time that we have left the Theatre to itself; nor have we, of late, given our Readers any Discourse, either upon the Actors, or the Drama: The Truth on't is, the Stage, for this Season, has crept on in so indolent a Way, that it has not minister'd Occasion for any new Essay upon the entertaining Subject of Plays. But as the Old House has lately attempted a Drama, after the Manner of the ancient *Pantomimes*, it falls naturally within our Province as a Paper of Entertainment, to make some cursory Remarks upon it.

He thus admits criticisms within his province, and goes on to explain that he never has written nor ever will write a critique while the play is still in its first run, for he wishes to give it a full hearing and a chance to make its profits before he will attempt to tell the public what is "the true Value of its Ware." In spite of this declaration of purpose, it is only the fray with

Cibber which keeps *Mist's* busy with theatrical matters during 1724 and 1725. There is to be found but one more discussion of drama in its pages up to its transformation into *Fog's Weekly Journal* in 1728.<sup>32</sup> And *Fog's* merely carries on through 1729 with the fray against Cibber, or on the political aspects of *The Beggar's Opera*. The *Universal Journal* (No. I, December 11, 1723, to No. XXXVIII, August 29, 1724) declares in No. I: "The Pulpits, and the Theatres, we shall consider as the Mediums of Instruction; We shall not therefore suffer the One to be seditious, nor the Other to be immoral." It does print an occasional report from Button's Coffee-House after the manner of the *Tatler*, discussing plays and the state of the theatre. The best critique is that, on February 12, 1724, of Edward Young's tragedy, *The Brothers*; and there is an interesting discussion (July 4, 1724) of the propriety of making fun of the *citizen* in comedy. The paper had but a short run or we might have had in it an interesting body of criticism, for the custom was fairly well established. The most highly developed specimen of criticism in this third of the century is the single number (No. II, February, 1726) of the *Universal Mercury*, a monthly, which dealt with "Publick Shews and Diversions." Here we find the reporting spirit with an admixture of criticism which is characteristic of the department of theatrical criticism in periodicals. Yet in none of the remaining three issues of the periodical are the theatres discussed. On February 25, 1727, a certain "Tim Hopeful" offered his services as critic to *Read's Weekly Journal; or British Gazetteer*—and that is the last we hear of him. During this period the daily newspaper had been developing into something more complex than the mere advertising and news sheet of the earliest years. By 1728, for example, the *Daily Journal* had an occasional issue with long correspondence as a

<sup>32</sup> December 2, 1727, a paper giving reasons for believing *The Double Falsehood* to be by Shakespeare. See Nicoll, Allardyce. *Eighteenth Century Drama, 1700-1750*, Cambridge, 1925, p. 222.

leading article, in place of news dispatches. This space had not yet been used for theatrical criticism, but the way was opened for that material. Not until the next decade will it find that way.

We may now take a summary glance back at the contributions to the study of drama and dramatic criticism of the writers in the periodicals up to the end of the first thirty years of the eighteenth century. During this period the comedy of manners had risen to its finest height in Wycherley, Congreve, and Farquhar. Here had come also the attack upon the moral influence of this comedy of manners. While the dramatists tried to find a way to combine the dramatic effectiveness of the Restoration plays with a less flagrant indifference to indecency in subject, characters, and language, there still raged the controversy over the principles involved. Nearly all the journalistic writing about the theatres which we have unearthed so far deals with the question of the morality of the drama in some way or other. There are those extremists, like John Tutchin and Daniel Defoe, who are opposed to the whole institution of the theatre because it is in their opinion allied with the most destructive social forces and is in its very nature certain to be so allied. Then there are those who attack merely the abuses which Jeremy Collier had complained of—bad language, abuse of the clergy, and the failure of the dramatists to distribute rewards and punishments equitably to the good and the wicked. But there are also, significantly, those who maintain that such powerful realistic portrayal of the vices of society which the comedy of manners achieved is an effective means of checking the spread of the vices. The moralistic point of view also leads a critic like Lewis Theobald into warped judgments of Shakespeare's tragedies. Steele, the greatest critic of the period, was one of the promoters of the "moral" drama and in his criticism he was among the opponents of the moral effect of Restoration comedy. Over the production of his play, *The Conscious Lovers*, arose the first open discussions of

the antagonism between the dominant tradition of the comedy of manners set by Wycherley and Congreve and the new sentimental comedy. While this early period of journalistic criticism is not very fruitful, its products do introduce us to this fundamental controversy in European drama of the eighteenth century.

Literary criticism of this period was dominated by the neo-classic doctrines and "rules." Naturally the journalistic critics adopted the standards and methods of this leading school of criticism. But just as in the more formal critical writings of the period the English are to be found not wholly subjugated to the formalism of the "rules," so the periodical critics are found picking their way cautiously among the precepts and adopting only those which pleased them. Of course the great stumblingblock was the "sublime irregular" Shakespeare whom no rules could divorce from the admiration of his countrymen. Their appreciation of him was often qualified by such claims as that of Theobald that one must not expect anything more than "a number of beautiful incidents, true and exquisite turns of nature and passion, fine and delicate sentiments, uncommon images, and great boldness of expression," for Shakespeare did not have the power to create perfect models according to the recognized "rules." Too rigid and conventional application of the terms of neo-classic criticism, however, was already calling down ridicule, as we have seen in the burlesque of contemporary dramatic criticism in Thomas Gordon's essays called *The Humorist*, and in Gordon's declaration that his critical principle was the search for "nervous sense and bold thoughts." In the freedom from merely mechanical standards, however, Steele again stood out as the most remarkable critic of the time. We have met in him a critic whose method was that of the scholarly and cultured but flexible and impressionable spectator of drama. It is not possible to say how far such freedom in Steele and in other critics who wrote in these periodicals may have been due to the fact that their

writing on the current theatrical performances was the immediate recording of impressions of the drama in the theatre with all the conditions present which make drama a different type of literature from all others. We may say, with caution, that there are signs that theatrical critics developed an attitude different from that of the critics who read plays in the study.

It is certain that when it came to reporting upon the new growths in drama, like the opera and the pantomime, the critic had no "rules" to rely upon and must needs make up his own standards. At first there was a good deal of opposition to both these new kinds, and some of the opposition was based upon reference to the "rules" of "legitimate" drama and to something termed "sense" which resolves itself into a mere refusal to accept the conventions of a new kind of art. The *Muses' Mercury* as early as 1707 defended opera, as we have seen; but even Steele joined the attackers of this kind of entertainment. It will be a long time before pantomime will receive anything but scorn from the critics.

Another phase of criticism which was now being practiced for the first time through the medium of the periodicals was that of acting. In the few essays of this period we find some excellent beginnings towards a literature about acting which will grow tremendously through the century—a century of actors who apparently deserved the best critics who could be found.

It may be noted lastly that the criticism also revealed a tendency towards the study of the characters of drama. We saw this as far back as the *Gentleman's Journal*, and saw it highly developed in Steele. The early nineteenth-century interest in Shakespeare's characters reached its height in the periodical criticisms by William Hazlitt which were later made into his book on *The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*. This tendency in the study of Shakespeare seems to have grown out of the necessity for a theatrical critic to make up his mind about a character in order to criticize the performance of an actor in the part.

Of all these things the first period of the present study gives but faint hints, except in the work of Steele where so many of them are seen in full flower. The regrettable thing is that the progress of theatrical criticism was so slow and spasmodic that later men did not build at once upon Steele and leave to us a more complete record of the stage than the ensuing chapters can describe.

## CHAPTER II

1730-1750

The decade between 1730 and 1740 brought some important developments in the history of theatrical criticism. The period was not remarkable in the progress of English drama, but it did afford a number of incidents which might and did draw forth some journalistic discussions. There was a marked dearth of new comedies, and none of those produced, except the doubtfully interesting plays of Fielding, showed any merit. There continued the usual crop of pseudo-classic tragedies, including one or two of James Thomson's, Aaron Hill's translations of Voltaire's tragedies, and others by Mallet, Brooke, and less known men. On the other hand the vogue of domestic tragedy got great impetus from this decade, for here we find the two prose domestic tragedies of George Lillo, *The London Merchant* (1731) and *Fatal Curiosity* (1736), Charles Johnson's *Caelia, or The Perjur'd Lover* (1732) and John Hewitt's *Fatal Falsehood*, as well as other plays affected by the sentimental spirit of these. Numerous after-pieces, farcical, musical, and pantomimic, were produced and fell into immediate oblivion. During the last part of the decade of the thirties we find a quickened interest in Shakespearean comedy which resulted in revivals in altered form of *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *As You Like It*. Fielding's activity in the satirical farce brought down the Licensing Act in 1737 and made theatrical affairs for a time the center of public discussion.

The newspapers give some record of all these developments. Several daily newspapers ran throughout the period and two or

three began their careers during it and ran on into the latter half of the century. While it was extremely seldom that even a new play was reviewed in the columns of these daily papers, and while it was only on extraordinary occasions that they contained articles or correspondence about theatrical affairs, the thrice a week, semiweekly, and weekly newspapers contain some writing about the drama which is more promising than anything we have met since Steele's *Tatler*. The decade also saw the founding of the first two periodicals definitely devoted to the art of the theatre, though we must not forget that Steele had conducted the *Theatre* for the support of his interests in Drury Lane. One prolonged newspaper war brought forth a good deal of writing centering in theatrical affairs, and the occasion of the passage of the Licensing Act of 1737 caused the papers to publish letters and editorials taking sides for and against the bill. Finally, in 1739 a daily newspaper is found for the first time running a series of essays on current theatrical matters, not daily but every two or three days. Thus with the close of the decade we come upon the first daily with a theatrical section.

We may look first at some of the scattered attempts to deal with the drama in the weekly papers. The *British Journal, or the Traveller*, between December 5, 1730, and February 13, 1731, ran a series of essays, almost weekly, dealing with questions about the stage and the drama. "The Traveller" argues the value of the theatre to public morals and attempts to prove that success in dramatic art is consistent with the interest and fame of a nation. Serious opera is championed by him, but he is entirely opposed to such "rubbish" as *The Beggar's Opera!* Whenever he takes up a particular play for examination he tends to stress the moral teaching which he finds there. For example, he writes (No. 154, December 12, 1730) a lengthy criticism of *King Lear*, and declares himself in favor of Nahum Tate's version over Shakespeare's because in Tate's almost every character is an instance of virtue rewarded and vice punished, and then he

sums up the "moral inferences" to be gathered from the play. In discussing Shadwell's *Squire of Alsatia* (No. 156, December 26, 1730), he confines himself to the "moral part." His last paper is his best, and is reprinted in Thomas Cooke's *Comedian* in 1732 (No. III, June).<sup>1</sup> This paper is a lively piece of irony attacking the contemporary plays. A country gentleman is represented as complaining of a practice of booksellers in advertising the plays they publish as plays which have been "represented at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane," whereas any man of taste knows that the managers would never think of playing such rubbish. He then names a list of plays all of which are, of course, known to have been played. This series of theatrical articles shows an interest in the drama but no very promising disposition to deal with the performances most recently produced nor with the acting of those or other pieces.

The production of John Gay's opera *Achilles*, in 1733, drew forth some criticism in several journals which seldom referred to the theatre.<sup>2</sup> On February 16 the *Daily Courant* published an essay vigorously disapproving of this attempt even by the great Gay himself, and especially attacking those who attempt to imitate him or support him in things beneath the level of *The Beggar's Opera*.<sup>3</sup> An author subscribing himself "Some Body" in the *Grub Street Journal*, No. 165, February 22, takes issue with the *Daily Courant* critic and defends Gay's burlesque of the Achilles legend. The *Gentleman's Magazine* prints a short summary also of remarks in the *Craftsman* favoring this opera.<sup>4</sup>

The *Weekly Register* commenced some time in 1730. The first issue to contain any discussion of the theatre or drama was

<sup>1</sup> This suggests that Thomas Cooke may have been the author of the *British Journal* series.

<sup>2</sup> In *Applebee's Original Weekly Journal* for January 20, 1733, appeared a puff of the opera before its performance.

<sup>3</sup> For reprint see *Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. III, February, 1733, p. 78.

<sup>4</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. III, February, 1733, pp. 84-85

No. LXXI, August 21, 1731, when there appeared a defense of Lillo's *London Merchant*. The critic praises the author for overcoming so well the prejudice against characters considered so "low," and says that the play as represented in the theatre soon grips the audience in spite of the fact that it is a new kind of tragedy. He defends the endeavor to create this new kind of play so long as the play itself pleases. He closes with "the lesson" of the piece. Here a journalistic critic is seen entering the discussion about new departures in the drama and to be bringing to bear upon the question his actual experience in the theatre as a member of the audience. He is not, like so many of the dramatic critics of the time, bound by merely pedantic "rules." Yet on November 20 his newspaper published "Criticisms on Dramatic Writings from various Authors," an essay which is a most pedantic discussion of the Greek "rules." A long letter from a correspondent is published in installments on December 4, 1731, January 8, 15, 1732, containing a detailed criticism of Rowe's *Fair Penitent* and Otway's *Venice Preserved*, especially of the latter. Then on January 29 there begins a series of essays under the caption, "The Reformer, by Tim Birch, Gent." In "Reformer" No. II was printed a scheme for uplifting the English drama, by appointing a committee to pass on plays, made up of knowing gentlemen. In No. VIII (March 25) was an essay on the bad manners of the footmen's gallery. "The Reformer" thus did not take occasion to deal in theatrical criticism. Only once or twice did the *Weekly Register*, through the remaining years of its life, which ended in 1735, publish reviews or discussions of the theatre.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Weekly Register, or Universal Journal*, No CXL, December 16, 1732 (On tragedy and some tragedies); No CXLI, December 23 (Dryden and Lee's *Oedipus* highly praised in review); No CXLIII, January 6, 1733 (General remarks on chief actors, leading up to humorous anecdotes about the stage, and an attack on Cibber); No CLII, March 10 (Ironical praise of Fielding's *Covent Garden Tragedy*); and No. CCLXXVI, August 16, 1735 (Leading article on theatrical matters).

One of the most prominent journals during this period was the *Universal Spectator and Weekly Journal*, by Henry Stonecastle of Northumberland, Esq. The first number of this weekly was published on October 12, 1728, with a preliminary article written by Daniel Defoe. The authors were Henry Baker, a son-in-law of Defoe, John Kelly, and others. This paper was of much higher literary quality than many others of its time. Each number opened with a full-page essay on literature, politics, or religion. Selections of these essays were reprinted in 1747 in four volumes. Yet during the years of its life, 1728 to 1742, the theatre is subject for discussion surprisingly seldom. The first essay dealing with it is to be found in No. CXXXI, April 10, 1731, where "Crito" complains of the degenerate drama of the day and sketches the history of English drama. About a year later (No. CLXXI, March 25, 1732) there is a comic paper with a letter from "Benjamin Bombast" about his turn for tragedy. After a specimen of his tragic drama has been brought forward he is advised to turn his talents towards making machinery for pantomimes. The first essay dealing with any current performances is that in No. CLXXXVIII, May 13, 1732, in which a comparison is drawn between the "false sublime" of an entertainment called *The Blazing Comet* (which was a burlesque and quite wrongly taken seriously by the critic) and the simplicity and noble sentiments in *The Married Philosopher*, a recent comedy written by John Kelly, one of the authors of the *Universal Spectator*. Two or three times only during any year does the *Universal Spectator* give over its columns to discussion, usually general discussion, of drama. When the editors had been criticized for entering into theatrical disputes, they replied (No. CCLIII, August 11, 1733) that they did not consider the absurdities of the stage too low to concern them; on the other hand, says "Henry Stonecastle," "I design'd not to make them one continued subject, but to mention them only among other foibles of the age." This same explanation could be made for

most of the newspaper editors of the first half of the century. The essays which the *Universal Spectator* did print are, however, very typical examples of eighteenth-century criticism. They express regret that burlesque and buffoonery have superseded tragedy and advise a young tragedy writer to read Aristotle, the Greek drama, the Italian critics, French tragedy with special attention, Shakespeare, and Horace (December 19, 1732). They satirize pantomime<sup>6</sup> and complain of the debased tastes of English audiences.<sup>7</sup> They glorify the ennobling effect of tragedy, especially of the pathetic parts.<sup>8</sup> They urge the moral value of comedy, saying that humor without a moral is nothing but buffoonery and that "the end of comedy should be to improve."<sup>9</sup> On the same grounds, of moral influence, they defend the profession of acting; and they contain at least one statement of the wholesome view that a play must be seen rather than read, in order to be fully appreciated.<sup>10</sup> This point of view leads "Henry Stonecastle" to make at least one excursion to the theatre in the spirit of the purely impressionistic theatrical critic, he thoroughly enjoyed himself at a performance of *Is You Like It* and wrote about his pleasure, just as "Isaac Bickerstaff" would have wished him to do.<sup>11</sup> He even found himself realizing how an audience could enjoy both a fine play like Shakespeare's and the performance of the Italian dancers who followed the play. He suddenly reveals the qualitics of a first-rate critic of the theatre and leaves us with still greater regret that he gave so little space to such reviews. In 1743 a correspondent complains to "Mr Stonecastle" that there have been no good new plays or good actors within the last few years; yet David Garrick had already

<sup>6</sup> Nos. CCL and CCLI, July 21, and August 4, 1733. Also No. CCCLXXXIX, May 15, 1736.

<sup>7</sup> No. CCCXIII, October 5, 1734.

<sup>8</sup> No. CCCXXXIII, February 22, 1735.

<sup>9</sup> No. CCCXXXIX, April 5, 1735.

<sup>10</sup> No. CLXXIX, March 11, 1732.

<sup>11</sup> No. DCXLI, January 17, 1741.

taken the town by storm<sup>12</sup> It is the neglect of such opportunities by such critics that disappoints us most in the search for dramatic criticism during this period. Criticism was subject, as it always is, to scornful attacks, especially the more informal kinds of criticism And the *Universal Spectator* has given us a description of the usual sort of criticism which got published in pamphlets and journals of the time, whenever men turned to comment upon the new plays. In No. CCCXXXIX, April 5, 1735, there appears this recipe for a critic:

A Good Quantity of *Stage Terms*, such as you may gather in the *Put any first Night of a new Play; a Grain and a half of Judgment, little or no Reading, and a Prejudice and Ill-Nature Quantum Sufficit. Probatum est C D (Crab Damplay)*

N B. The Terms chiefly recommended are *Fable, Manners, and Moral*, which in making up the Recipe you must manage thus

As soon as you have nam'd the Word *Fable* you must proceed to *Definition*, and tell what *it is* and what *it is not*, obscure the Readers Understanding as much as possible with what you don't understand a Word of yourself

*"Then write about it, Critic, and about it"*

As for *Manners*, shew how they *differ* and *don't differ*; what is *in Character* and *not in Character*, and affirm there is not an *Author* in *England* knows what they are beside *yourself*; and take care to write in a Style that not one of them shall know for you.

Then for *Moral*, you must write *daringly*, for tho' the *Poet* you censure should have it run thro' his whole Play, you must confidently assert, that the Comedy is *ridiculous, unmeaning, and uninstructive*: That all the rest of the Town is *blind*, and that you are the *only Man* that can see clear in it—You should also acquaint the World that you are the most *learned Man of the Age*, lest they should not happen to find that Secret out

This recipe holds good against any *Theatrical Performance* whatever.

When we turn from the *Universal Spectator* to the *Grub-Street Journal* we are descending into the arena of politics, theatrical politics, and personal squabbling.<sup>13</sup> Yet we shall meet here a

<sup>12</sup> No. DCCLXXXII, October 1, 1743.

<sup>13</sup> For a complete study of the contents of this journal see Hillhouse,

good deal of interesting criticism of contemporary drama and we must sort out that from all the "Cubbean" billingsgate. The *Grub-Street Journal* was first issued on January 8, 1730. The "Society of Grub Street" declares that it will defend its character and aims by publishing a weekly work with an account of all books of importance, with political dissertations, with new poetry, and with "characters" of deceased members of the Society. The editor calls himself "Bavius" and asks for communications. The journal actually reprints extracts from the newspapers, especially the daily papers. It opens its columns to correspondence which does not always seem to be the work of the editors themselves, for sometimes letters on both sides of a heated controversy will appear in the same issue. Throughout its four hundred and eighteen numbers<sup>11</sup> the journal carried on a succession of wars with persons whom its conductors for sundry reasons came to dislike. We shall never find dispassionate criticism in the essays and letters which deal with theatrical performances and new plays. There will usually be other factors than aesthetic quality which will disturb the critic's judgment. Yet the journal, having found its chief enemies in certain actors, dramatists, and theatrical journalists, does give much more space to theatrical matters than any other newspaper of the period.

"Mr. Bavius" did not promise regular theatrical criticism when he commenced publication. Yet in No. 7, February 19, 1730, the leading article is an elaborate review of *The Humours of Oxford*, a comedy by James Miller. The review gives mock praise to the play for its neglect of the unity of action and of consistency in character. Then it goes on into detailed comment upon the language and sentiments of the play in such a slashing style that the play, if ever a play were killed by a review, should

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James T., *The Grub-Street Journal*, Durham, North Carolina, 1928. "Bavius" is there identified as Russel, "Dramaticus" as Sir William Yonge.

<sup>11</sup> The last number appeared on December 29, 1737.

have been ruined utterly. Likewise William Popple's *Fashionable Lady, or Harlequin's Opera* is attacked in detail on April 23, 1730, and found to be as silly as the things it tries to ridicule. No more criticisms were printed until 1732. In February of that year there began a series of letters from alleged correspondents who signed themselves "Dramaticus," "Prosaicus," and "Theatricus" and who took up the business of theatrical criticism more regularly. Their first step was to attack the managers on the ground that they were not motivated by honest judgment in their choice and rejection of plays, and hence that no new plays got a hearing. They ridiculed the term "theatrical" which the managers had used in rejecting plays. On June 29, 1732, "Prosaicus" wrote from Tom's Coffee-House promising to review the coming new plays at Drury Lane in regular letters to the *Grub-Street Journal*. While the other "correspondents" continued their contributions, "Prosaicus" did not take up his career as theatrical critic until August 24. He then criticized Fielding's *Old Debauchees* and *Mock Doctor*, wrote notes on two other plays, *Rural Love* and *Devil of a Duke*, and then disappeared from the pages of the newspaper forever. Doubtless the man who wrote the letters under that pseudonym merely hid himself under some of the numerous other names which are signed to the letters that crowd the journal.<sup>15</sup> It is in the irregular letters that we must find whatever continuous reporting of theatrical matters there is to be.

In this correspondence can be found reviews of new plays and criticism of contemporary acting. No. 167, March 8, 1733, contained a critique of Charles Johnson's tragedy *Caelia, or The Perjur'd Lover*. The critic began by admitting that his chief intent in writing was "to shew how insufficient the present Managers of *Drury Lane* Play-house are to discharge their Trust, as

<sup>15</sup> On August 9, 1733, "Philo-Musus" promised that he would write criticisms of every new piece to be produced at Covent Garden during the rest of the summer; but like so many others, he failed to keep the promise

Directors of our Entertainments." In spite of this belligerent attitude the review of *Caelia* is very sensible and fair and well written. The realism of the domestic tragedy is found somewhat flat when compared with poetic tragedies like *Othello*; and the recognition of that leads the critic to say that something more than "nature" is needed in high tragedy. He admits, however, that in the performance Mrs. Cibber's<sup>16</sup> acting created a very real pathos which the lines could not have done by themselves. He closes with sneers at the judgment of the managers of Drury Lane, none of whom "except one (not the Laureat) know any more of what I have been saying about Taste, than if I had written in Latin." This is the most serious and able review to be found in the correspondence. There are many other slight references to current plays, amounting often to nothing but sneers at some feeble after-piece. Then there is a discussion of the acting of a new actor, named Stevens, which allowed the critic to describe with some vivid details the acting of Colley Cibber and James Quin.<sup>17</sup> Other reviews are printed in connection with one or other of the numerous battles which the *Grub-Street Journal* carried on.

Probably the most famous of these battles was with Henry Fielding<sup>18</sup> The full story of this quarrel can be read in Professor Wilbur L. Cross's *History of Henry Fielding*, Volume I, Chapters IV to IX. The quarrel began after the production of Fielding's comedy, *The Modern Husband*, in February, 1732. The play, Fielding said, "had such success that I began to think it a good play till the Grub Street Journal assur'd me it was not." This "assurance" was given in a letter from "Dramaticus," printed in the *Grub-Street Journal* on March 30, 1732. The

<sup>16</sup> This was Theophilus Cibber's first wife, *née* Jenny Johnson, who died shortly after the production of *Caelia*.

<sup>17</sup> October 31, 1734, and November 7, 1734.

<sup>18</sup> See Hillhouse, *op. cit.*, pp. 173-85 for a detailed account of the quarrel also.

critic said that the surest way to judge a play is to read it. Hence, though he admitted that *The Modern Husband* was a success in the theatre, he was ready to assert, after reading it, that it did not serve the end of comedy, namely, to divert and instruct mankind. He found the play a mere hodge-podge of "catch-claps," the characters vile, and the whole thing "a heap of absurdity" totally lacking in "instruction." Fielding did not reply to the attack at once. His friend, Thomas Cooke, however, wrote a defense of the play in the June number (No. III) of his periodical the *Comedian, or Philosophical Enquirer*. On June 1, Fielding produced at the Haymarket Theatre two new plays, *The Old Debauchees* and *The Covent Garden Tragedy*.<sup>19</sup> The *Grub-Street Journal*, on June 8, published a letter from "Prosaicus" declaring that he saw nothing in *The Covent Garden Tragedy* but immoral characters, indecent scenes, and bawdy wit. The next week "Dramaticus" also stormed at that play. A defender of the author appeared in "William Hint, Candle-snuffer," who wrote a letter published in the *Daily Post* on June 21 and in the *London Evening Post* on June 22, challenging the correspondents of the *Grub-Street Journal* to show wherein *The Covent Garden Tragedy* was indecent, and accusing them of mere personal spleen. On June 29, "Prosaicus," as we have noted before, promised to write reviews of all new plays which were to come out at Drury Lane and first of all a review of *The Old Debauchees*. In the same issue, "A. B." replied to "Mr. William Hint," reiterating the charges of indecency in Fielding's play. Also "Dramaticus" replies to "Hint's" charges against himself. Finally there appeared a fictitious certificate from "Wm. Hint" accusing Theophilus Cibber and Fielding of writing the letter in

<sup>19</sup> In the *Tragedy* Fielding satirizes the critic of the *Grub-Street Journal* by identifying with him the character Leathersides, who "has learned to read well enough to make out the play-bills, and so regards himself as fully equipped to write, as he is doing, the dramatic criticisms in the *Grub-Street Journal*." See Cross, *op. cit.*, Vol I, p. 129.

the *Daily Post* under his name. On July 13, "Dramaticus" replied to Cooke's defense of *The Modern Husband*, and was seconded by "Bavius" himself. The week following the leading article was written by "Publicus" and entitled "Critical Remarks on *The Covent Garden Tragedy*, and *The Old Debauchees*." It quoted passages to illustrate its charges of obscenity and dangerous immorality in the two plays. A letter from a "Dramaticus, Senior" in the *Daily Courant* for July 29 drew from the original "Dramaticus" a letter of personal vilification, published in the *Grub-Street Journal*, August 3.<sup>20</sup> On August 10, "Bavius" recounted the story of the whole controversy with Fielding, and "B. B." gave some specimens of *Covent Garden Tragedy* to ridicule them. "Prosaicus" began his career as editor of theatrical news, as promised in June, on August 24, with a review of *The Old Debauchees*. He said that the author had striven for but never quite achieved real wit or humour, he pointed out the sources of the characters, most of whom he found to be mere imitations of other writers. He refused to criticize *The Covent Garden Tragedy* because others had already criticized it sufficiently. He so far left his enmity of Fielding as to praise *The Mock Doctor*, but tempered the praise by remarking that since he did not know Molière he could not be sure how much of the praise to give to Fielding. Finally, on September 14, "Bavius" once more reviewed the whole controversy. Here the quarrel rested for a time. The production of *Pasquin* in March, 1736, drew the fire of the *Grub-Street Journal* towards Fielding again, but perhaps chiefly because the journal's chief enemy at that time, Aaron Hill, in his periodical, *The Prompter*, was praising the satirical powers of Fielding as shown in his latest play. On

<sup>20</sup> Fielding did not let these attacks go unanswered, it appears. Professor Cross is convinced that a letter signed "Philalethes" in the *Daily Post* for July 31 is from Fielding's own pen defending himself against some of the specific charges of immorality in his writing. This only spurred the *Grub-Street* writers on to further attacks.

April 22 there began an analysis of *Pasquin*. The critic declared that the play held up to ridicule all the most learned and honorable members of society. On May 6 he continued in the same tone of horror at the shocking satire and challenged the *Prompter* to prove that the satire was directed against the abuse of religion, law, and other serious matters, and not against the things themselves. But the *Grub-Street Journal* had long since lost interest in attacking Fielding and was after other game. During its warfare with him it had published some lively, if prejudiced, contemporary accounts of his plays and had thus contributed in an irregular way to the growth of theatrical criticism.

After a minor controversy in May, 1733, over the treatment which John Rich had given to the plays which Aaron Hill had offered to him for production, the *Grub-Street Journal* plunged into the warfare between the players and the patentees.<sup>21</sup> The actors at Drury Lane, headed by Theophilus Cibber, had become rebellious against the tyrannical rule of the playhouse by the amateur actor-manager-patentee, John Highmore, and had seceded and set up for business in the Little Theatre in the Haymarket. Only Miss Raftor (later Mrs. Clive) and a few minor performers remained at Drury Lane, but with the aid of actors loaned by Henry Giffard of the theatre in Goodman's Fields and with a new actor who was later to become famous, Charles Macklin, the patentee was able to carry on. The town was in an uproar over the dispute for about a year. The *Grub-Street Journal* seemed more disposed to take the side of the patentee than that of Cibber and his associates. It opened its columns, however, to correspondents on both sides, sometimes devoting the whole paper to the discussion. This kind of discussion did not lead to any criticism of plays.

Early in 1736 a quarrel broke out between the *Grub-Street Journal* and the *Prompter*.<sup>22</sup> This paper, which was devoted so

<sup>21</sup> For a good account of this dispute see Brewster, Dorothy. *Aaron Hill*, New York, 1913, pp. 118-22.

<sup>22</sup> See Hillhouse, *op. cit.*, pp. 196-206, for detailed story.

largely to discussions of the theatre and the drama, will require our study in detail a little later. Here it will be sufficient to point out how it drew another journal like the *Grub-Street* into discussions of plays. The first attack of the *Grub-Street* was on January 8, 1736, when "Bavius" argued against some of the "Prompter's" statements and especially called in question his Latin quotations. On February 12, the conductors so far forgot their former animosity towards the Cibbers that they turned against the "Prompter" for his attack upon Colley Cibber, and declared that he was "unintelligible, unfair, and ungrammatical." In February there began a series of letters from "Neither-side" ridiculing first the puffing by the *Prompter* of William Popple's play, *The Double Deceit*. As the *Prompter*, to which Popple was one of the contributors, replied to the charge, "Neither-side" and other correspondents carried on the warfare even through the summer. Finally the dispute, which is extremely uninteresting throughout, ended with a mock obituary, published in the *Grub-Street Journal* on September 9, for the *Prompter*, which had ceased publication on July 2. All this correspondence was merely theatrical politics, and contained no critical essays.

The next controversy in which the *Grub-Street Journal* engaged was that over the choice of an actress for the part of Polly in *The Beggar's Opera*, a controversy which raged from November, 1736, to January, 1737. The journal opened its columns to correspondents who favored Mrs. Cibber or who urged that the dispute be closed by dropping the play for the season. The outcome of the quarrel was to lead the *Grub-Street* into antagonism to the *Daily Journal's* theatrical critic who was by this time writing under the caption, "The Occasional Prompter." But the letters which carry on this wrangling almost never contain any criticism of plays, and only some discussion of the fitness of Mrs. Cibber and Mrs. Clive for the parts of Lucy and Polly in *The Beggar's Opera*. This was the last battle of the journal for its farewell number appeared on December 29, 1737. During its career it had carried a good deal more discussion of theatrical

matters than any newspaper heretofore had done, but in most instances it was discussion of other matters than the artistic merits of the new plays or of the performances of old plays. Only in one or two criticisms of Fielding's plays has it added anything to the journalistic criticisms which we are reviewing.

We now come to the first opening of the daily newspapers to discussion of plays and actors. We have mentioned the fact that these newspapers were becoming large enough and ambitious enough to print long essays as leading articles. On November 13, 1734, the *Daily Journal* reprinted the first number of Aaron Hill's *Prompter* and expressed the hope that the public would support so worthy a publication. On the next day the *Daily Courant* did the same. During the next fifteen months the *Daily Journal* reprinted seven numbers of the *Prompter* showing an interest so far at least in drama. On November 13, 1736, a correspondent, "Aequus," wrote to correct the popular notion of the character of Polly in *The Beggar's Opera* and to contrast with her true character that of Lucy Lockit. This letter was a contribution to the discussion as to whether Mrs. Cibber or Mrs. Clive were the more suited to play the part of Polly. This is an early example of the critical study of character which becomes one of the most important duties of a theatrical critic who would arrive at a just notion of the achievement of an actor in a rôle. Another correspondent, on November 22, sent in to be reprinted the *Prompter* No CV, a discussion of Nathaniel Lee's play, *The Rival Queens*, which was that day to be revived at Drury Lane. But on December 6 a much more important development occurred. In the *Daily Journal* for that day appeared No. I of "The Occasional Prompter," which inaugurated a series of essays on the theatre. The aim was to follow up Aaron Hill's *Prompter* and work for the good of the stage, to be impartial, except in defense of the interests of the public. It was disclaimed that either of the writers of the *Prompter* was writing this new series. "The Occasional Prompter" entered at once into the current con-

troversy about the merits of Mrs. Cibber and Mrs. Clive as Polly. He printed letters from many correspondents discussing all aspects of the dispute. In No. X, December 29, 1736, he complained of the taste of the town for buffoonery and praised the Ladies' Shakespeare Club. Through most of the others among the twenty-eight numbers of "The Occasional Prompter" he was discussing the relations between managers and players or arguing with writers in the *Grub-Street Journal*. There are two interesting papers, however, on the alterations of Shakespeare's plays (Nos. XXI and XXIV, February 11 and March 5, 1737). The critic declares that Shakespeare should not be judged by critical "rules," and hence should not be altered to fit those "rules." Any alterations which are to be made should be made with the intention of excising the barbarisms due to Shakespeare's age and of heightening the things which Shakespeare left on a lower level. This might be an excellent principle, provided one had the power of "heightening" Shakespeare. But the critic reveals his own taste alarmingly by saying that he approves of Nahum Tate's additions to *King Lear*, the love scenes between Edgar and Cordelia; and that he approves of the chastening of Catherine in *Henry V*. He argues, however, against the possibility of altering *King John* and is skeptical of Cibber's attempt at it before he has seen the result. In the second paper, "Phil-Shakespear" writes his objections to the alterations of names of characters and of the title of *Much Ado about Nothing* in the revival of that play in mangled form under the name, *The Universal Passion*. This was a series of theatrical criticisms in a daily newspaper which promised a good deal more than it performed. Some of the other daily newspapers published occasional letters about the current controversies but nothing approaching this series in regularity.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, November 13, 1736; November 19, and December 4, 1736 (on the Clive-Cibber controversy); and *Daily Gazetteer*, January 22, 1737 (on Samuel Johnson's opera, *All*

The one other event which drew out the miscellaneous writers in the newspapers during this decade was the passing of the Licensing Act in 1737. As a result of the increasing vigor and daring of the attacks by Fielding upon the character of the Walpole ministry, a bill was introduced on May 24, 1737, for the regulation of the stage. This bill closed all theatres except those holding royal patents, that is, Drury Lane and Covent Garden. It also put into the power of the Lord Chamberlain the licensing of all theatrical entertainments, a power which he had formerly exerted in a few instances but without so formal and complete sanction by law as was now given him. The newspapers, which were in many cases organs for party opinion, arrayed themselves on either side of the controversy. The chief organ of the Government was the *Daily Gazetteer*. The Opposition expressed itself in the columns of the *Craftsman*, *Fog's Weekly Journal*, and *Common Sense*. Of course the controversy was largely one of political principle and hence does not concern us in our search for theatrical criticism except in the few places where those newspapers used specific criticism of the drama and of the current performances as examples with which to drive home their opinions about the need for or the dangers of censorship. Usually the writers were concerned with those plays and entertainments, like Fielding's *Historical Register* and *Pasquin*, which had an obvious political bearing. It became necessary to discuss the principles of the art of dramatic satire. The *Daily Gazetteer* on May 7, 1737, complained of bringing political matter upon the stage at all. Fielding himself replied to this in an essay, signed "Pasquin,"<sup>24</sup> defending the kind of satire which he had been writing by asserting that he had been attacking not *all government*

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*Alive and Merry*); October 25, 1738 (on the political aspect of the introduction of French players), May 21 and 24, 1739 (remarks on the tragedy of *Gustavus Vasa*).

<sup>24</sup> This attribution is made on the authority of Professor W L Cross  
See *History of Henry Fielding*, Vol I, pp. 220-22

and wise and good politicians but only those corrupt and foolish leaders whom no one could defend. He pointed out that laughter, instead of being a supporter of vice was a very effective weapon against it. The *Daily Gazetteer* in a reply to Fielding's letter on June 4, denied that Gay's operas actually ridiculed vice and declared instead that they colored vice "more amiably than truly." On the same day the *Craftsman* argued that the licentiousness of the stage is the result of the immorality of the age rather than the cause of it. The *Daily Gazetteer*, in the course of its almost daily discussion of various aspects of the dispute, compared the English drama with the Greek, quoted at length from D'Aubignac on Attic comedy for the purpose of warning the English against allowing their comedy to bring about the same punishment which was meted out to the Athenian comic writers, and even condemned the whole of English drama as at that time existent.<sup>25</sup> On July 6 the *Gazetteer* took another tack in its defense of the Licensing Act, in declaring that the Act would clear the stage not only of immoral plays, but of dull, irregular entertainments like Fielding's, which were artistically bad. The *Craftsman*, on July 2, quoted a number of passages from Shakespeare which it ironically urged the Lord Chamberlain to cut out because they might be interpreted as criticism of the Government. For this paper the *Craftsman* was suppressed for a time, but it returned to the discussion on July 30 with a paper on the degeneracy of the stage as shown by the popularity of opera and puppet show. Only in such arguments do the discussions of the Act in the newspapers approach criticism of the current plays.

The periodical essays of the type of the *Spectator* had been to some extent absorbed in or superseded by the newspapers with their leading articles. Yet we must look at a few periodicals of the older form, especially at one of them which is primarily devoted to the theatre. In No. I of the *Comedian, or Philosophi-*

<sup>25</sup> *Daily Gazetteer*, June 10, 11, 13, 15, 24, 1737

*cal Enquirer*, April, 1732, Thomas Cooke explains his design.

I will endeavour, to the utmost of my Power, to detect every Imposition that may cloud the Understanding, or debauch the Taste, in Theology, Philosophy, Poetry, Painting, Music, and I will descend sometimes to spend an Hour on the buskined Heros of *Drury-Lane*, and *Lincoln's-Inn-Fields*, not forgetting the inferior Diversions of the great.

In June he reprints the lively paper which we first found in the *British Journal* for February 13, 1730, and adds to it the defense of Fielding's *Modern Husband* against the attack of "Dramaticus" in the *Grub-Street Journal*. In No. VII, October, he is led by the death of Wilks to make some observations upon the present state of the theatre in London, and upon elocution. He then reviews the merits of the chief performers. This latter sort of review of the performers was followed by many a critic in pamphlet and newspaper in later years of the century, and is the ancestor of Leigh Hunt's *Critical Essays on the Performers of the London Theatres, including general observations on the practice and genius of the stage* (1807). But Thomas Cooke wrote no more about the theatre and his periodical ceased with No. IX, April, 1733, because, according to the *Memoirs of the Society of Grub Street* (Vol. II, p. 310), the sale did not defray "the charges of paper and print."

The *Auditor* (No. I, January 9, 1733, to No. XXXV, May 8, 1733) was formed on the model of the *Spectator* with a club of fictitious characters. One of these characters, "Tom Cynick," went with the "Auditor" to see Mills play *Hamlet*. No. IX of the *Auditor*, February 6, contains an account of the remarks of "Cynick" upon the acting of Mills and upon the failure of actors to recognize what parts they are fitted for. Then "Cynick" flies into a rage over the "entertainment" which followed the play and which he calls a disgrace to the English stage. In No. XXII, March 23, "Tom Cynick" is again quoted on the subject of Fielding's adaptation of *The Miser* from Plautus and Molière. He finds some inconsistencies in the principal characters, but

closes with the statement that the play is "the only Play deserving the Name of Comedy, this long while, except *The Married Philosopher*." These are the only theatrical criticisms in this periodical, and they show the customs of the *Spectator* holding sway even to the infrequency of comment on the current drama. The same thing may be said of the *What-D'Ye-Call-It* (No. I, November 24, 1733, to No. V, December 22), by "Rev. Mark Moral," which also has a club of characters and devotees but one of its five issues to a discussion of the squabble between the players and the patentees, of the pernicious effects of farce and buffoonery, and of the moral value of the stage when properly conducted.

The one great attempt to carry on continuous discussion of drama and the theatre during the decade was, however, Aaron Hill's twice-a-week periodical, the *Prompter*, which ran from November 12, 1734, to July 2, 1736. Hill was assisted in the writing of the paper by William Popple and possibly by James Ralph.<sup>26</sup> According to literary tradition Popple's contributions were signed "P." We may separate the essays for study, but the points of view of the collaborators are much the same. If we may trust the attribution of the essays according to initials, Hill emerges as the writer of the more general articles on drama and acting and of those on Shakespeare and modern tragedies; Popple was especially concerned with opera, pantomime, and some new plays, and with writing ironical plans and proposals ridiculing the present state of the stage. Though the *Prompter* did not treat exclusively of theatrical matters, the writers have left a full commentary upon the drama, the theatrical organization, and the public taste of their day.

Aaron Hill began his paper with the declaration of intention to be "Prompter to the World":

Nor can I think it any Dishonour, since the Stage has so long been transcribing the World, that the World should now make Reprisals,

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<sup>26</sup> Brewster, Dorothy *Aaron Hill*, New York, 1913, pp. 122 seq

and look as freely into the *Theatres* . . . Let their Managers therefore be upon their Guard, and their Dependents, Tragic or Comic, take good heed to their Parts, since there is, from this Day forward, arisen a PROMPTER, *without Doors*, who hath a *Cat-call*, as well as a *Whistle*; and, whenever the Players grow flat, will himself make bold to be *musical*.

One of the general principles which Hill emphasized throughout was the great good influence of the stage in the commonwealth when it was properly managed, and the corresponding evil influence when in the hands of unscrupulous men. He believed that the stage could be so managed as to cause an improvement in the taste and morals of the public. When he discussed a clergyman's ruthless attack upon the very existence of the stage in a civilized society, he deplored the thought of the abolition of such an instrument for good and declared that the answer to the opponent should be a real effort to reform the stage. He believed in some form of governmental control of the theatres; in 1735 he said, in a discussion of the bill for regulation of the theatres, that he was in favor of some regulation, but wished to see the power taken from the present patentees and given to more capable men, and that he favored the free competition in theatres which would bring the best to the top, allow the opera and pantomime to flourish in the large patent theatres, and encourage good tragedy and comedy in smaller, more seriously conducted houses. At the very beginning of the baneful restriction of legitimate drama to the patented houses, we thus see this contemporary critic envisaging the evils of the system.<sup>27</sup>

Hill's opinion of the state of the drama and theatres in his time was not very high. The first cause of the evils he felt to be the ignorance and avarice of the managers. The patents had descended by heredity, rather than by merit, and had thus come into the hands of men who cared only for profits and not for the advancement of the public good through drama; it was on them that the rise of pantomime and meaningless spectacle might be . . .

<sup>27</sup> For these discussions see the *Prompter*, Nos. 30, 38, 42, 53, and 54.

blamed.<sup>28</sup> No. 132 is a "stage eclogue between Lunny Lightwit and Common Sense," that is, between John Rich, the promoter of pantomime, and the enemy against which pantomime was directed.

The second cause of the present state of the drama was the want of genius and instruction in the actors. In the first place some of the actors had through vanity been led to claim the management of the theatres; and the actor-manager system had led to worse and worse acting rather than to better.<sup>29</sup> This same vanity had caused the actors to neglect the study of their parts; they did not take rehearsals seriously, and hence made blunders and stood staring into the pit; they misconceived the parts they played and hence falsified them in their acting; they did not know how to play on the passions, had learned their gestures from Quintilian on oratory, and had indeed been chosen not for their ability to act nor their intelligence, but for their pleasing voices.<sup>30</sup> He pleaded for more attention to "nature" in the acting, the actors neglect to play their parts except when they themselves are speaking:

They *relax* themselves, as soon as any Speech in their *own* Part is over, into an absent Unattentiveness to whatever is *replied* by *Another*. looking around and examining the Company of Spectators with an Ear only watchful of the *Cue*, at which, like *Soldiers*, upon the *Word of Command*, they start, suddenly, back to their *Postures*, TONE over the unanimating *Sound* of their Lesson; and, then (like a *Caterpillar*, that has *erected itself* at the Touch of a *Twig*), shrink again, to their *CRAWL*, and their *QUIET*. and enjoy their full *Ease*, till next *Rowsing*.

His general impressions of the manner of the present actors were:

Their too *general*, and undeniably *Defect*, from a kind of *lazy, unfeeling Indolence*, wherewith they rather *repeat* their Parts, than *act* them gliding, *painlessly*, on with the *Verse*; and neither *touch'd* by,

<sup>28</sup> Nos 79 and 117

<sup>29</sup> Nos 56 and 79.

<sup>30</sup> Nos 51, 56, 57 ("P"), 64, 66.

nor *imprinting*, the SENTIMENTS. . . Whereas the Stage is the Empire of the *Passions*; where nothing languid, unmark'd, or indifferent, ought to have Place: but Every Thing shou'd be *animated*, *picturesque*, and *alarming*

The ladies refused to weep even in the most pathetic situations, lest they spoil their faces or disarrange their costumes. The heroes performed their dying scenes and other passionate scenes with anything but judgment and decency:

I have seen, in *Shakespeare's* Phrase, a Robust Perriwig-pated Fellow, shake a Tempest of Powder about him, and fall (like a Chimney in a high Wind), not only *fright'ning*, but *blinding* All who stood under his *Ruins*' . I have seen *Oroonoko*, instead of *throwing himself upon the ground* like a Man who wou'd pierce into *Earth*, to escape from his *Pains*, and his *Insults*, kick back his Heels, into the Air, and spring high, to fall heavy, like a *Flounder*, in a *Fish-woman's Basket*.<sup>31</sup>

In the important matter of interpretation of the famous parts, Hill had been pained to see Lear played with the emphasis upon the piteous qualities in the character rather than upon the old man's tragic and terrible impatience; Jaffier in *Venice Preserved* made too amorous and humble; Tamerlane in Rowe's play of *Bajazet* given a "sneakingly passive" air like that of a "sheep-biter."<sup>32</sup> Hill had also advice to give on pronunciation and on the delivery of soliloquies.<sup>33</sup> He made a thorough study of acting and wrote out his theory in a prose essay and in a poetical essay.<sup>34</sup> The theory was based upon a psychological analysis of

<sup>31</sup> No. 62                   <sup>32</sup> Nos 64 and 95                   <sup>33</sup> Nos 104 and 113.

<sup>34</sup> *The Actor; or, guide to the stage; exemplifying the whole art of acting: in which the dramatic passions are defined, analyzed, and made easy of acquirement. The whole interspersed with select and striking examples from the most popular modern pieces* London: 1821 "Published by Lowndes. In the Preface it is stated to be a reproduction in small compass of Aaron Hill's celebrated Essay on the Histrionic Art" Lowe, R W *Bibliographical Account of English Theatrical Literature*, p 2. The verse essay was published in 1746 as *The Art of Acting. Part I Derviving rules from a new principle, for touching the passions in natural manner. An essay of general use, to those who hear, or speak in public, and to the*

human passions; the conclusion was that there are six "dramatic passions," joy, sorrow, fear, scorn, anger, and amazement; the task of the actor is to conceive the required one by "a strong and intent Imagination" and then his tone, gesture, and posture will assume the natural form for such a situation. Hill elaborated his theory in extreme detail and was not always sensible or practical; but there is no doubt that he was preparing the way for the public reception in 1741 of David Garrick's naturalistic acting, which might not otherwise have been able so quickly to rout the established formal, statuesque, oratorical school of James Quin. He had already poured ridicule upon the "puffed, round Mouth, an empty, vagrant Eye, a solemn Silliness of Strut, a swing-swang Slowness in the Motion of the Arm, and a dry, dull, drawling Voice that carries *Opium* in its detestable *Monotony*," and upon particular practicers of the art, thinly veiled under the names, "Mr. Strain-Pipe, Mrs. Ever-Whine, and Mr. All-Weight."<sup>35</sup>

The third cause of the degeneracy of the stage was the poets' emphasis upon stage art, rather than upon the great end of drama—presumably "to hold the mirror up to Nature." The poets were intent upon gaining for themselves wealth and fame; hence they degraded their art. Tragedy was already debased; and comedy, though it might seem to be still flourishing, was really immoral in its influences.<sup>36</sup>

Another evil influence was the character of the audiences which congregated in the theatres; if the drama was bad, it was to a large extent the fault of the audiences which approved of such stuff. Hill divided the audience into six classes: the flutterers who went to be seen themselves; the indolent, who went to

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*practisers of many of the elegant arts; as Painters, Sculptors, and Designers: but adapted, in particular, to the stage with view to quicken the delight of audiences, and form a judgment of the actors, in their good, or bad, performances.* London (Osborn), 1746.

<sup>35</sup> *The Prompter*, Nos 66 and 92.

<sup>36</sup> No 79.

kill time; those tortured by care, who went to get rest; the victims of domestic infelicity, flying from their homes; the fashionable, who went because others went; and a large class of more dangerous people. How then could one expect taste to exist?<sup>37</sup> Corroboration of his condemnation of the taste of the public was found in the meager house which greeted a new tragedy and in the audience's rejection of *Every Man in His Folly*.<sup>38</sup> Hill was moved to a wistful comparison between the English audience and the Athenian audiences in ancient times.<sup>39</sup> He called earnestly upon the audience to come to the assistance of worthy actors and restore the drama to its rightful place.

Hill showed his taste in drama in his reviews of plays from King Lear down to the silliest pantomime. His review of *King Lear* was one of the best papers in the *Prompter*; he had not been pleased with the actor's interpretation of the part, and hence was drawn into a complete study of the character in order to point out his objection convincingly. While he seems to have had enthusiastic admiration for Shakespeare, he does not appear to have objected to Tate's alterations.<sup>40</sup> Again, he declared that though many of the old comedies and tragedies tired in the repetition on the stage, *Hamlet* never grew stale; in one essay he discussed the character of Hamlet, compared Wilks and Booth in the part, analyzed the scene between the Ghost and Hamlet, and described the acting of Wilks in this scene and in the play scene. Here is a part of the essay:

The characteristic Distinction, that marks the Temper of *Hamlet*, is a *pensive*, yet genteel HUMANITY,—He is, by *Nature*, of a *melancholy Cast*: but, His polite Education has illuminated the *Sable*; and, like the Sun, through a *wet MAY* morning, mix'd a *Gleam* with his *Sadness*—When he *grieves*, he is never *Sullen*: when he *trifles*, he

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<sup>37</sup> No. 80

<sup>38</sup> No. 10 The tragedy was probably William Duncombe's *Lucius Junius Brutus*, November 25, 1734 No 136. Connolly's *The Connoisseur, or Every Man in his Folly*, D L, February 20, 1736

<sup>39</sup> No. 110

<sup>40</sup> No. 95

is never light —When alone, He is *seriously solid*: When in Company, *designedly flexible* —He *assumes*, what he pleases: but he *is*, what he ought to be,—the Lamentor of his murder'd *Father*:—the Discerner of his *Mother's Levity*. and the Suspecter of his *Uncle's Baseness* How *weigh'd* then, and *significant*, should he be found in his *Looks*, and his *Actions!*—When He counterfeits Distraction with *Ophelia*, and perceives that she is *observing him*, All his Air is light, and as empty of Purpose, as if *really as mad*, as He designs She should *think him*—But, no sooner has he declin'd himself from the Glances of HER Eye—than His own gives us Marks, of his *Pity*, and his *Prudence*—The WILDNESS He but *affects*, quits his Air in a Moment, and a touching Sensation of SORROW *paints* his *Soul*, in his *Gesture*: which again, the next Moment, He transforms into *Wantonness*, in the very Instant of Time, while he *returns* toward the Lady.<sup>41</sup>

Hill made a terrific outcry against the revival of *The Maid's Tragedy* by Beaumont and Fletcher; his attack was chiefly from the point of view of the moral influence of the play; and he joined Thomas Rymer, by quoting Rymer's "unanswerable" criticism. He showed his well-known admiration for Voltaire, not only by vigorously defending his own translation of *Zaire*, which was called *Zara* and became a fairly popular tragedy on the English stage, but by devoting three papers to discussion of and quotation from the play (in Hill's translation again) and the Preliminary Discourse and Dedication.<sup>42</sup> There were not many comedies for him to notice during these years He devoted three papers to *The Double Deceit* by his colleague, William Popple. Before the play was produced he wrote an advance notice favorable to it. Then he entered into the discussion of the alleged plagiarism of Popple; but when the play was condemned by the audiences, he went into a long discussion of it, called it a true and regular comedy, gave many extracts from it, and commented on it in quite the opposite strain from the audience's judgment.<sup>43</sup> The great run which Fielding's *Pasquin* obtained made Hill ad-

<sup>41</sup> No. 100

<sup>42</sup> Nos. 60, 62, 158, 159, and 162.

<sup>43</sup> Nos. 134, 137, 140, and 141

mit that there might be more to Fielding than he had seen; and he complimented the audience which approved such excellent satire.<sup>44</sup> Hill had no use for opera; he saw in it a degradation both in the rational taste for drama and in the country's morals; he made an attack which showed that he was not even willing to grant the ordinary conventions of the opera—it appeared only absurd to him that dialogue should be sung, for example. Yet in an effort to improve the species he proposed a plan for a two-act opera, *Daraxes*, which should have a story worthy the name, and a moral—the two desiderata of the current opera.<sup>45</sup> Finally he attacked the pantomimes and other entertainments which had grown to such enormous proportions and threatened to usurp the place of the "legitimate" drama. He blamed the rise of these entertainments upon the system of hereditary patents, as we have seen; and he considered them the very antithesis of common sense and good taste.

William Popple, who assisted Aaron Hill in the *Prompter*, was the grandson of a nephew of Andrew Marvell. He had a few juvenile poems published and produced one comedy, *The Lady's Revenge, or The Rover Reclaimed*, at Covent Garden Theatre in January, 1734. His second comedy, *The Double Deceit, or A Cure for Jealousy*, was produced while he was writing for the *Prompter*. He later published a translation of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, and was honored with a line in *The Dunciad*:

Lo P—p-le's brow tremendous to the town.

For the last nineteen years of his life he was governor of the Bermudas. He was encouraged in his literary pursuits by Aaron Hill.<sup>46</sup> His criticisms in the *Prompter* are in much the same spirit as those of Hill, but some few special characteristics may perhaps be noted. He was more violent in his antipathy towards the Italian opera; his violence at times became more vicious than the opera which he was attacking; it took the turn of vitupera-

<sup>44</sup> No. 147.

<sup>45</sup> Nos 14, 125-126, 155

<sup>46</sup> See *Dictionary of National Biography*, "William Popple"

tion of the male soprano, Farinelli, who was the rage of London, and nasty-minded reflections upon the moral influence of such a person's popularity.<sup>47</sup> He considered the opera more vicious than the most amorous drama, for the music served to soften, to enervate, and to inflame the passions and leave them undirected. In this attitude he was but one of a large number of English people who made the first years of the opera in England very precarious. He was equally scornful of the pantomimes and entertainments which the managers provided. He saw all sorts of evil effects of such entertainments upon the development of drama, upon the stage, upon the actors, and upon the audience.<sup>48</sup> His antagonism culminated in a proposed agreement between the poets and the "town" (i.e. the "beaux and belles, Critics and Templars") for the promotion of better taste in dramatic poetry: the poet was to agree "to follow Nature," to trust the taste of the town, and to take no part in the production of "entertainments"; the town was to agree to study "Nature" more, in order to become better judges, and not to go to opera or to pantomime any longer.<sup>49</sup> He took the part of the actors in their petition against being put at the mercy of the patentees of the theatres; he discussed the difficult matter of the assignment of parts with some desire to arrive at the justice of the problem.<sup>50</sup> Other questions between authors and managers, and authors and actors, he discussed fully, as a friend to both sides, but with some partiality towards the authors who seemed under the present system to be the greatest sufferers.<sup>51</sup> Like Aaron Hill he was disturbed by the failure of the actors to study their parts thoroughly enough to give the right interpretations of the characters; and he made one of the early protests against the traditional manner of playing Polonius, which was and has continued to be to make a buffoon out of him. His essay provides a really interesting study of the character of Polonius.<sup>52</sup> Popple was the author of

<sup>47</sup> The *Prompter*, Nos 7, 10 (Hill?), 37, and 106      <sup>48</sup> Nos. 127, 128

<sup>49</sup> No. 47.      <sup>50</sup> Nos 45 and 123.      <sup>51</sup> Nos 93 and 94      <sup>52</sup> No 57.

the one paper in the *Prompter* which was devoted to a complete survey of the new plays of the season; he was interested to inquire whether the taste of the town was so debased as it had appeared to be, hence he took up the new plays, briefly pointed out that the tragedy *Brutus* was but a translation of a translation, a double plagiarism, that *The Christian Hero* by George Lillo was that un-English thing, a religious drama; that Fielding's *Universal Gallant* was so bad that its acceptance would have proved the existence of false taste, and that therefore the town showed its good taste in damning all of these plays; furthermore, he pointed out that Robert Dodsley's *Toy-Shop* was "without any theatrical merit" but had such "general and well-adapted satire" that the town was to be congratulated upon having approved of it.<sup>53</sup> His criticism of James Miller's *Man of Taste* dealt chiefly with the indebtedness to its sources in Molière; but in a second paper he went into detail in the comparison of Vanbrugh's creative treatment of his originals in *The Country Wife* and the slavish method of Miller.<sup>54</sup> He concocted an amusing letter from Gay "in Hades," telling of the condemnation of his *Beggar's Opera* by Aristotle and the other judges below, on the ground of moral influence; but the judges were particularly incensed at the new comic opera sequel, *Mackheath in the Suds*.<sup>55</sup> The best of Popple's critiques is an essay on Lee's Alexander the Great play, *The Rival Queens*, which he found full of rant, vain-glory, and lewdness, and without a properly inspiring moral, and on Congreve's *Double Dealer*, which he praised for its wit and its plot, but deplored for its too lenient treatment of Maskwell, a figure too villainous for comedy. This essay has the marks of the critical principles of the age, but is written with great spirit and with some shrewdness in appraisal of effects.<sup>56</sup>

The *Prompter* covered a wide range of subjects and affords us an insight into the taste of the day, the more enlightened taste. Hill and Popple doubtless deserve to be called the first profes-

<sup>53</sup> No. 29.

<sup>54</sup> Nos. 35 and 41

<sup>55</sup> No. 39.

<sup>56</sup> No. 105.

sional theatrical critics, for Steele's activities ended too early. They were not only the first, however; they were also among the few who for a very long time made any serious attempt to approach the theatre with knowledge of both the drama as literature and the stage as a public enterprise. They are found studying carefully the subtleties of the characters of Shakespeare, that they might help the actors to interpret those characters accurately. They were hospitable to the drama of their time which had even a spark of merit, and they were much concerned with educating both managers and audiences so that the way might be easier for serious authors to travel. Hill had a well-defined theory of acting and a genuine appreciation for imaginative effects in that art and deserves an important place in the history of English acting in this century. If one can overlook some of the barbarities of punctuation and style in these criticisms one can find enough vivid writing to bring many aspects of the dramatic performances clearly before his imagination. It will be twenty years in our survey before we meet with so important a body of theatrical criticism.

The decade between 1740 and 1750 is distinguished in the history of the English drama and theatre only through the production of one of the century's most popular comedies, *The Suspicious Husband* by Dr. Benjamin Hoadly (1747), and the beginnings of the career of David Garrick, as actor in 1741, and as manager of Drury Lane Theatre in 1747. In spite of the important changes which Garrick helped to bring about in the repertories of the theatres and in spite of the opportunities which his own acting gave for theatrical criticism of a high order, this period strangely enough produced much less criticism in the periodicals than the preceding one. The newspapers made no effort, it can be said in general, to lead or to record the public opinion. No periodicals did better than to publish very infrequent letters from correspondents or leading articles upon the drama or the affairs of the theatres. One of the affairs which did

draw a good deal of newspaper discussion was the secession of some of the players from Drury Lane, led by Charles Macklin and Garrick, because of differences with the patentee, Fleetwood. Like the discussion over the quarrel between Highmore and Theophilus Cibber in 1733, this centered merely in the various participants. In a few of the magazines we do find some excellent reviews of the two or three important plays which were produced, but for the rest we must report an almost complete dearth.<sup>57</sup>

Throughout the decade the newspapers carried brief notices of the performances among the other news paragraphs. Sometimes these were published previous to a performance and are obviously the "puffs" which Sheridan was later to ridicule in *The Critic*. At other times they were merely news of what had happened the night before and only very infrequently did they include any kind of comment upon play or acting. When there was any comment, it was rather perfunctory praise which suggests that the note may have been sent by the managers or the actors themselves.<sup>58</sup> An exception is to be found in an essay quoted in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for February, 1747, p. 79, taken from No. 94 of an essay series entitled "The Fool" and published in the *Daily Gazetteer*. In this number of "The Fool" a correspondent "Sam Riot" wrote a letter about *The Suspicious Husband*, by Dr. Benjamin Hoadly, which had been produced on February 12; the letter pretended to condemn the play but was in reality praising it for its sense and humor. In the same volume of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, pp. 71-72, is an essay from *The Anatomist and News Regulator* for January 31, which contains a review of Garrick's farce *Miss in her Teens*, ridiculing the

<sup>57</sup> See also Chap III, *post*, for Fielding's critical writings during this period. His journals contribute some essays on acting and an excellent review of the second most important play of the period, Edward Moore's *The Foundling*.

<sup>58</sup> Percy Fitzgerald in his *Life of Garrick*, Vol I, p. 89, is happy to find a note about Garrick's first appearance in 1740, so happy indeed, that he even calls the mere note enthusiastic.

claim made by Garrick that the characters and manners are "natural" and praising the actors for making something diverting out of a mere nothing. Such essays as these are the only bits of criticism which one meets in the perusal of the daily and weekly newspapers of the period.<sup>59</sup>

There is not much advance in the magazines either, until near the end of the decade. The *Female Spectator*, by Mrs. Eliza Haywood, from April, 1744, to March, 1746, comments occasionally upon the theatre but gives no criticism of any length or interest, and devotes only one long paper to theatrical affairs; Book VIII begins with a letter about the Licensing Power and goes on to a discussion of plays new and old, particularly of Otway's *Caius Marius* in comparison with *Romeo and Juliet*, and closes with the revealing dictum that Shakespeare would have thanked Otway for altering and "refining" his play. The *Museum, or the Literary and Historical Register*, published fortnightly by Robert Dodsley, from March 29, 1746, to September 12, 1747, began late in its short career to give some attention to the current theatrical performances. In No. XXV, February 28, 1747, was published an essay "On the Present State of the Theatre. A Letter from a Gentleman in Town, to his Friend in the West." The "gentleman" makes some interesting remarks about the actors of his day, which suggest a sensitiveness to the art of acting which would have made him an excellent critic if there had been developed at that time a more regular demand for theatrical criticism in the periodicals. He remarks that the stage has never been so fashionable, not even in the time of the height of Mrs. Oldfield's fame. Some years ago, he says,

Quin was then at the Head of his Fraternity; but a very different Man from what he is at present, and merely a bad copy of Booth; with all his Mouthing and Pageantry, but without his musical Elocu-

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<sup>59</sup> See also the *General Advertiser*, February 18, 1749, for a garrulous letter about Johnson's *Irene*, written with great partiality for the play and its author.

tion, or his Dignity. Whether Time or Emulation has had the greatest Hand in improving him, I know not; but certain it is, that he is improved, beyond what you will really imagine He has got much more Variety, and much more Spirit He was always a tolerably just Speaker; but then he was hardly any thing more, he recited, rather than acted In this he resembled his Predecessor *Booth*, and in my Opinion he still retains too much of the deep Rotundity of his Pronunciation, and the formal Deliberate Sway of his Motion.

However, he finds his Falstaff unexceptionable and prefers some of his tragedy to Booth's. But "as for Garrick," the critic says, "he has given me so many new Ideas in Acting, that I am not sure you will understand what I now write to you, till you have seen him." And he gives a long description of Garrick. This he follows with some discussion of the powers of Mrs. Cibber and Mrs. Pritchard, then the leading actresses, and closes with a plea for more respect for the actor's profession and for more care on the part of the actors to control their own actions and manners so as to deserve the increased respect. In No. XXXIV, July 4, is an essay "On the Modern Diversions of the Hay-Market. A Dialogue between Sir Charles Modish and Mr. Attick." This is a discussion of the performances which Samuel Foote was making popular at the Haymarket Theatre, in which he mimicked and satirized prominent individuals of the day. The speakers in the dialogue compare his work with that of Aristophanes and argue whether the performances are good for the nation or not. In No. XXXVI, August 1, are "Further Remarks on the Drama," answering some criticism of English comedy that it is written only for its own time, by saying that such must comedy always be. Then the writer gives a comical "receipt" for tragedy and one for comedy. In No. XXXVIII, August 29, appeared "An Enquiry into the Nature of the Passions and the Manner in which they are represented by the Tragick Poets, particularly with respect to Jealousy: including some Observations on Shakespeare's *Othello*." This was a refutation of Rymer's notorious criticism of *Othello*, by telling an historical narrative paralleling

the story of *Othello*.<sup>60</sup> The *Lady's Weekly Magazine, Publish'd under the Direction of Mrs. Penelope Pry*, No I, February 19, 1747, contains the promise, "Our Secretary, Mrs. Penelope Pry, shall dispatch her Emissaries to all Quarters of the Town for Intelligence; No Plays, Balls, Gardens, Masquerades, Musick Meetings, Assemblies, or other Parties of Pleasure, shall escape her Notice." But we have only this promise, as no further numbers were issued. It is unaccountable that "Sir" John Hill did not deal more regularly with the theatre in his *British Magazine*, 1746 to 1750, for in the next decade he will be found in the thick of many a journalistic battle about theatrical affairs. In the *British Magazine* he published a number of essay series, called "The Visiter" (*sic*), "The Moralist," "The Occasional Spectator," and the like, but in none of them did he devote himself to theatrical criticism. In "The Visiter," No. II, 1746, he told of some experiences in the "Green Boxes" and criticized the audiences, not the plays nor the performers. In 1748 "The Moralist" wrote one paper on "Theatrical Performances and their Influence on the Minds of the Audience" On the occasion of the revival of Garrick's farce, *Lethe*, on January 2, 1749, Hill wrote some "Remarks on the New Entertainment Lethe." Here he began his quarrel with Garrick which will be heard for many years following. He here attacked the actor for his self-advertising and for his general political scheming. In June appeared an "Essay on the Art of Puffing . . . with some Remarks on the Self-Applause of another Set of Publick People, the Players, and particularly of the modern Prince of that motley Community." In October he printed more criticism of the manage-

<sup>60</sup> The *Museum* was edited by Dr. Mark Akenside and printed contributions from many famous men of letters, including the Wartons, William Collins, David Garrick, and Joseph Spence. As Spence is said to have written "many of the literary criticisms," it is possible that he is the author of the essays on the theatre and drama. See Ralph Straus: *Robert Dodsley, Poet, Publisher, and Playwright*, 1910, pp. 82-86

ment in a letter, and in November a discussion of the French players. Throughout 1750 he printed occasional letters from correspondents, sometimes praising Garrick, sometimes attacking him.

The *London Magazine*, which he had been running since 1732, printed during the decade no criticisms of plays or performances. The *Gentleman's Magazine* reprinted, as we have seen, a few of the essays first published elsewhere, but in March, 1747 (Vol. 17, p. 133), "Mr. Urban" published a letter nearly eight pages in length dealing in full with Benjamin Hoadly's comedy *The Suspicious Husband*, which was the most important dramatic production of the decade. The letter described in a sentence each character in the play, then told the story in great detail (evidently from the published play), and finally gave three columns to criticism of the piece. The critic quoted some of the "sentiments" of which he approved, made some objections to the technique, especially to the use of the soliloquy, which, like a post-Ibsen critic, he found not "natural," and discussed the "moral" of the play, which he found a bit defective because the rather rakish gentleman, Ranger, was not completely reformed by his experience. This was the first piece of criticism of a new play to appear originally in the pages of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The next year saw the beginnings of a regular custom of criticism of new plays. The magazine opened its February number, 1748, with the following remark:

*The Foundling*, a new Comedy, having given so much pleasure in the representation, that it has been already exhibited ten nights, and the boxes taken for many more, we hope the following sketch of it will not be displeasing to any.

There followed a summary of the plot of Edward Moore's comedy. This account, however, drew from a correspondent, "H. G." in the March issue, a letter criticizing the comedy. In the issues for May and June a reply to "H. G." went into the discussion of plot, characters, and moral of *The Foundling* in great

detail. When Otway's tragedy, *The Orphan*, was played in the fall of 1748, the *Gentleman's Magazine* printed a long discussion of the play, in the issues for November and December. Then in January, 1749, appeared the first of the long series of "plans" or "accounts" of new plays or alterations of old plays, which this magazine and other periodicals were to print throughout the rest of the century. The note which precedes this "plan" shows the novelty of the writer's offering:

MR. URBAN,

As you have given us the plan of the last new comedies, with remarks, I have sent you a sketch, and some cursory observations on *Coriolanus*, Mr. Thompson's last Tragedy, for your next, if—

Yours, &c.

#### O R

The "plan" is a mere summary of the plot with a quotation of a large part of the last act. The same sort of "plan," with specimens, is given in February of Dr. Samuel Johnson's *Irene*; in April, of Aaron Hill's *Merope* (from Voltaire); and, in 1750, in January, of Shirley's *Edward the Black Prince*, followed by "Remarks" in February; in March, of William Whitehead's *Roman Father*. Thus the public could be sure of this kind of news and criticism of the current plays. There came a time when the same sort of "plan" would be printed in some of the more prominent newspapers as well.

In the criticism which we have studied in these two decades, 1730 to 1750, we have been able in a fragmentary way to see something of the development of popular opinions about drama and theatrical art. We may observe a continuance of the concern with the morality of the drama. When the freedom of the stage was threatened by the Licensing Act in 1737, it became necessary to state vigorously the value of the theatre as a social agent, a force for reform in manners and morals. The burden of the attack upon, as well as of the defense of, Fielding's plays was the tendency to make light of things which should be held in

esteem, or, for the defenders, to hold up to scorn the defiers of, or pretenders to, estimable virtues. In the most important body of criticism of the period, the *Prompter* by Aaron Hill and William Popple, this moralistic criterion was very prominent. We find in the period also some discussion of the state of English tragedy, for the Augustan tragedy had come to nothing, and domestic tragedy had not yet firmly established itself—its influence had indeed been exported to the Continent whence England would in a much later day have to reimport it. Sentimental comedy made no great advances during this period; hence we are not given much discussion of its merits. The opposition against opera and pantomime and puppet show continued with great vigor on the part of the journalistic critics. These entertainments were seen as the source of the decline in legitimate tragedy and comedy and were cried out against as foreign and nonsensical. Coffee-house discussions of acting occasionally crept into the periodicals; acting became a subject for theorizing as well as description. Especially after Garrick brought to the stage a more realistic type of acting, in opposition to the prevailing declamatory and formalized style, a controversy began which led to interesting writing on the subject later in the century.

## CHAPTER III

1750–1760

When we come to the decade between 1750 and 1760 we are for the first time justified in our search for theatrical criticism through the files of old newspapers and magazines, not merely by the discovery of the nearly unique work of a single critic, like Steele in the early period or Aaron Hill in the next, but by the discovery of a widespread tendency to include the theatre in the subjects which many conductors of periodicals consider legitimate for their productions, and by the discovery of a body of writing which creates for us more fully the atmosphere of criticism in which the dramatists and managers and actors did their work. In the first place, there is a large increase both in the number of periodicals and in their size and scope. This decade saw a prolific late growth of imitations of the *Spectator* written by distinguished men of letters and holding even today a place in the esteem of readers of the familiar essay. It was the decade of the *Rambler*, the *Idler*, the *World*, the *Adventurer*, the *Gray's Inn Journal*, the *Connoisseur*, many others of more narrowly political nature which were as well known in their day, and still others written by less important men but contributing distinctively to this study of theatrical criticism. It is the first decade of existence for the two most prominent literary reviews of the century, the *Monthly Review*, which began in 1749, and the *Critical Review*, which began in 1756. The newspapers which carried over from the earlier period were in some instances increased in size and scope. Other important papers were commenced, such as the *Gazetteer* and the *London Daily Advertiser*.

This enlarged body of periodical literature gives more room for the kind of writing which is the basis of this study, and we are particularly interested to find a decided tendency to consider that the reading public expected that the affairs of the theatre would be dealt with in the columns of newspapers, essay periodicals, and magazines. Not only did the editors promise that they would report upon and criticize the performances but unlike the earlier editors they frequently kept their promises. In one news paper, the *London Chronicle*, we furthermore find a series of criticisms which deserves to rank with the work of the late critics, like Leigh Hunt and William Hazlitt, as vivid and intelligent writing about the contemporary stage, a larger series than we have found in such a paper before and one that is perhaps the best in the century. It was the first decade in which most of the new plays produced on the stage were reviewed in one or more of the periodicals. But as it was a period less noted for the quality of the new plays produced than for its revivals of plays of Shakespeare and for the continuance in the repertory of other famous Elizabethan plays, we find especially interesting the mid-century comments upon an older drama; in a partially regular periodical criticism we get into close touch with some of the currents of popular opinion. As, furthermore, it was a great age for acting, it is gratifying to find a good deal of description and discussion of the art of Garrick, Mossop, Barry, and Mrs. Cibber; the criticism gives a good record of the transition from the formalized acting of Quin in the preceding years to the naturalistic acting of Garrick. Finally we may trace more distinctly than in any previous period the development of new attitudes towards drama itself.

In approaching the periodical criticism of the decade from 1750 to 1760 it may be helpful to review the work of Henry Fielding which culminated early in this decade with the *Covent Garden Journal* and which had for a long time made a center of disturbance in "Grub Street." After Fielding had been so influential through his satirical plays, especially *The Historical*

*Register of 1737*, in bringing about the Licensing Act, he did not grow cool in the warfare against his enemies. In 1739 he and James Ralph set up a periodical, the *Champion*, in which, in the words of his biographer, he attacked "his old antagonisms—Walpole, the Cibbers, the stage, the press, lotteries, and quacks of all kinds."<sup>1</sup> In the issue for December 11, 1739, for instance, he wrote an ironical defense of the Licensing Act and cast some sneers at each of the Cibbers. On December 13, "Captain Hercules Vinegar," the fictitious author of the periodical, who has been shown to be an adumbration of a real person who had left prize fighting to take charge of a bear garden,<sup>2</sup> wrote,

As the Play-House, since some ingenious young Gentlemen have turned it into a *Bear Garden*, falls naturally within my province, I shall think proper to animadvert on such Occurrences there, as occasionally happen,

and thereupon ridiculed a rather crude device used in making up "the angry spot" on a mimic "Caesar's brow." Only once in a great while afterwards, however, did the "Captain" discuss the drama or the theatre. Then in No. 128, September 6, 1740, one "Crab Fairhint" urged him "to deal regularly with theatrical matters." Consequently, in the next number there is an account of a visit to the theatre to see Milward play *Hamlet*—with which "Vinegar" was pleased—and some discussion of Fleetwood's assignment of the management of Drury Lane over to Quin. On September 16 (No. 132) were printed some comments of "correspondents" upon No. 129. After Fielding is supposed to have ceased writing for the *Champion*, there were two excellent discussions of the acting of David Garrick.<sup>3</sup> In No. 455 (October, 1742) is a letter from "Dramaticus" on "The

<sup>1</sup> Cross, *op. cit.*, I, 260.

<sup>2</sup> Wells, John Edwin: "Fielding's 'Champion' and Captain Hercules Vinegar" *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 8 (1913), pp. 165-172.

<sup>3</sup> Fielding is not thought to have contributed to this paper after June, 1741. See Cross, *op. cit.*, I, 260; and Wells, John Edwin. "The *Champion* and Some Unclaimed Essays by Henry Fielding," *Englsche Studien*, Vol. 46, p. 355 (1912-13).

Character of Mr. Garrick."<sup>4</sup> That there had not been a great deal of writing in newspapers about Garrick during his first year of experience on the London stage is suggested by the note which the *Gentleman's Magazine* felt called upon to write to inform its readers as to who Mr. Garrick was. The criticism has a delightfully negative style which tells a great deal more about the manner of acting practiced by Garrick's rivals than about his own. Yet it thereby praises his voice, his bearing, his attention to character, his versatility, and his ability to "copy Nature."<sup>5</sup> In No. 5 of the new series of the *Champion* (May, 1743) there was published "The Character of an Excellent Actor," a very well-written essay on the difficulties in the art of acting, upon the importance of acting in helping towards the understanding of a dramatist's meaning, and upon the excellence of Garrick's acting. Here is an early expression, in a day of rather predominantly literary and even pedantic criticism of the drama, of the view of the truly sympathetic theatrical critic: "And the Action of a just Player is a kind of living Criticism on a Dramatic Poem."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> This is the letter quoted by Percy Fitzgerald in his *Life of Garrick*, 1868, Vol I, pp 89-90. It is also to be found in full in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol XII, p 527 (October, 1742).

<sup>5</sup> The most often quoted passage may well be quoted again: "His Voice is clear and piercing, perfectly sweet and harmonious, without Monotony, Drawing, or Affectation, it is capable of all the various Passions, which the Heart of Man is agitated with, and the Genius of Shakespear can describe; it neither is whining, bellowing, or grumbling, but in whatever Character he assimulates, perfectly easy in its Transitions; natural in its Cadence, and beautiful in its Elocution. He is not less happy in his Mien and Gait, in which he is neither strutting or mincing, neither stiff or slouching. When three or four are on the Stage with him, he is attentive to whatever is spoke, and never drops his Character when he has finish'd a Speech, by either looking contemptibly on an inferior Performer, unnecessary Spitting, or suffering his Eyes to wander thro' the whole Circle of Spectators . . .".

<sup>6</sup> This essay drew from a reader of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, where it

Fielding himself—for we cannot be sure that he wrote any of those later essays in the *Champion*—contributed a letter on the state of the stage in the season of 1746 to 1747 to his sister Sarah Fielding's *Familiar Letters between the Principal Characters in David Simple, and Some Others*, which was published in April, 1747.<sup>7</sup> In his next journalistic venture, the *True Patriot* (No. 1, November 5, 1745, to No. 32, June 10, 1746), he dealt with only those aspects of the drama which could be twisted to political purposes; for example, he attacked by ridicule the Italian opera singers and, correlative, the Pope, the Pretender, and the Tory party in England.<sup>8</sup> In the ironical *Jacobite's Journal*, which he set up in 1747 to oppose the Jacobites by seeming to support them, he erected a "Court of Criticism" presided over by himself in the guise of "Judge Trott-plaid." "The public was strictly charged not to purchase any new book or to attend any new play at the theatre until it had received the approbation of the court."<sup>9</sup> The court sat regularly from No. VII (January 16, 1748) to No. XXXIII (July 23, 1748), during which time it arraigned Samuel Foote for his mimicry of his fellow actors and examined Edward Moore's comedy *The Foundling*, which it found on the whole a good comedy and ordered to be played at Drury Lane.<sup>10</sup>

Almost immediately after Fielding began to publish his *Court-Garden Journal. By Sir Alexander Drawcansir, Knight Censor of Great Britain*, No. 1, Saturday, January 4, 1752, he became involved in a "paper-war" with a number of other journalists. It is not to our purpose to tell the events of that war,

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was reprinted, a reply denying the moral value of the plays and enforcing the denial with a study of the plays of Terence for their moral sentiments. *Gentleman's Magazine*, July, 1743, Vol. XIII, pp. 373-75.

<sup>7</sup> See Cross, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 46-51.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 88-90, 90-91. See *Jacobite's Journal*, March 19, 1748

though it involves some of the other journals with which we shall have to deal later on.<sup>11</sup> What concerns us is the publication, at intervals during the warfare and amid the multitude of interests which distracted Fielding at this time, of criticisms of plays and of actors. In No. 5 of the *Covent-Garden Journal* (January 18 1752) we first find set up a "Court of Censorial Enquiry," like the "Court of Criticism" in the *Jacobite's Journal*. In his statement of his jurisdiction, "Sir Alexander" includes

*Fifthly*, Resolved, That both the Theatres, and all other Places of Diversion and Resort, are under our Protection; and every thing which passes at any of these, is subject to our Cognizance and Jurisdiction For which Reason we do most earnestly and seriously recommend to all our trusty and well beloved People to send us immediate Notice of any Misconduct or Misbehaviour that shall happen in any of the Managers of these Places of Diversion, or in any of the Performers or Spectators

When Mossop attempted to play Macbeth he was summoned, in this same legal jargon, before the Court. No. 10, February 4, gives the essence of Mossop's "counsel's" defense of him, and we are told that the case was dismissed. Mossop, in other words, was pronounced a promising actor, especially in the part of Zanga in Young's tragedy, *The Revenge*, and was even encouraged in his efforts to fit himself in the parts which Garrick had triumphed in. Nos. 13, 16, 26, and 27 are in part devoted to criticisms of the manners of the audiences and to the narration of occurrences in the theatre. No. 28 is a pure puff for an actor's benefit performance. No. 34 is a long paper about the profession of acting, compared with those of law and the army. The one paper which contains pure dramatic criticism is No. 62,<sup>12</sup> where there is a letter from "Tragicomicus" about William

<sup>11</sup> The most complete account of this paper-war is to be found in the *Introduction* to G E Jensen's edition of the *Covent-Garden Journal*, Vol. I, pp. 29-98. New Haven. Yale University Press: 1915.

<sup>12</sup> This paper, Mr Jensen thinks, was not written by Fielding Jensen, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 259, note to II, 95 5.

Mason's tragedy, *Elfrida*, and especially about his theory of drama and his criticism of Shakespeare. Thus, with a number of excellent opportunities open to him, Fielding, in his long career as a journalist, nowhere took up regular theatrical criticism as part of his task. In spite of his interest in the theatre and his willingness at any time to criticize the works of his contemporaries, and in spite of the belaboring which he had himself suffered from some journalistic critics, he never was interested in indulging in this kind of writing. It was left to lesser men of his day to make a more secure place for criticism in the periodicals.

The chief of the journalists who were engaged in the paper-war with Fielding was Dr. John Hill. We have already met this man of many talents as the author of the *British Magazine*, 1746-50. He was an apothecary and botanist and scribbler on a multitude of subjects. He was to squabble throughout his life with all sorts of men, and his methods were those of low, scurilous scandalmongering and vituperation. Yet it was said by Dr. Johnson himself that Hill, "if he would have been contented to tell the world no more than he knew," might have been "a very considerable man and needed not to have recourse to such mean expedients to raise his reputation."<sup>13</sup> On March 4, 1751, there appeared the first number of a new daily newspaper, the *London Advertiser and Literary Gazette*, called after April 17, the *London Daily Advertiser and Literary Gazette*. Among other things the avowed plan was "to make this Paper, in time, the General Channel of Literature and Amusement; new Books of Merit, and every Improvement of useful Science, together with modern Occurrences of any Degree of Importance, will be the Principal Objects of our Attention." Each day the leading article would deal with one or other of these topics. In the second issue of the newspaper there began an essay series called "The Inspector" which took the place of the leading article.

<sup>13</sup> Boswell, James *Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* (Ed. by Henry Morley), 1891, Vol. II, p. 32.

This series, it soon became known, was written by Dr. John Hill. On March 8, "The Inspector" wrote:

As we shall professedly make the publick Entertainments at the Theatres the Subject of many of our occasional Observations in the Introductory Part of this Paper, the Masque of Alfred, performed at this time to the Satisfaction of Crowded Audiences, has a Claim to our present Attention

There followed an appreciative review of *Alfred*, with high praise for Garrick and Miss Bellamy. Among the nineteen papers which Hill devoted to the theatre during the next two years are to be found some excellent critiques. But it is clear that his private quarrels and infinite political and miscellaneous matters crowded out theatrical criticism most of the time. Although Hill had himself failed as an actor he had in 1750 written a treatise called *The Actor*, which discussed very sensibly the principles of the art of acting. Now in these essays in the *London Advertiser* he paid particular attention to the actors and actresses. For the time being he seems to have lost some of his animosity towards Garrick and leaned towards praise of him both as manager and as actor.<sup>14</sup> He described Mossop's acting of the rôle of Richard III,<sup>15</sup> and Mrs. Cibber and Miss Macklin in Rowe's *Jane Shore*.<sup>16</sup> He was sympathetic towards new actors because he had experienced some of their vicissitudes himself.<sup>17</sup> In two papers he carried out a parallel between the art of painting and the art of acting, and then in a third he set a number of actors off against famous painters; for example, Barry was said to be the counterpart in his art of Julio Romano, Woodward of Paul Veronese, Miss Bellamy of Tintoretto, and Garrick of Titian. What in principle was rather suggestive became in such detailed application a *reductio ad absurdum*.<sup>18</sup> One of Hill's enemies was not long in pointing out the absurdity: Bon-

<sup>14</sup> *London Daily Advertiser*, October 25, 1751.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, October 3.      <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, October 30      <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, October 16.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, December 17, 18, and 30, 1751

nel Thornton, in his *Drury Lane Journal*, February 6, 1752, burlesqued this parallel in "An Inspector Number 66666," in which he drew a parallel between music and acting and compared Garrick with a harpsichord; Quin with a bassoon, or kettle-drum, or horn, or double bass, Barry with a violin; and so on. It is clear, however, that Hill had some excellent powers as a critic of acting, and that in spite of personal enmity he admired the art of Garrick sincerely and heartily. His tribute to Garrick in the part of Lear was his criticism at its most vivid and sympathetic:

I had been used to esteem the *Richard* and *Hamlet* of Mr Garrick his most capital Performances, but his *Lear* is equal to either His Fire in *Richard*, his Manner of throwing off the Player, of being, instead of representing the Character in *Hamlet*, are Excellencies that no other Performer has, or probably ever will arrive at, but his Madness in *Lear* is at least equal to either 'Tis an odd Effect of a Laugh to produce Tears; but I believe there was hardly a dry Eye in the House on his executing that first absolute Act of Madness in the Character While I admired the Action, I was almost at a Loss to comprehend in what Manner it was performed. 'Twas not any thing like the Laugh of Mirth or Pleasantry, the Triumph of a happy Imagination, but seemed merely an Exertion of the Organs of the Body, without any Connection with the Soul; an involuntary Emotion of the Muscles, while the Mind was fixed on something else. Upon the whole, the other Lears I have seen, not excepting one, of whom the World supposes me too fond, must pardon me, if I declare, that the frantic Part of the Character seems never to have been rightly understood till this Gentleman studied it.

Hill's two most lively papers were on the bad practice which audiences perennially indulge in, of applauding in the midst of scenes, and on the equally familiar character of "Miss Biddy Chat" who goes to the play to talk to her friends rather than to attend to the actors.<sup>19</sup>

Dr. Hill's papers in the *London Daily Advertiser* roused opposition in a number of quarters. We have seen that Fielding was soon drawn into a paper war with him, and replied through

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, February 27, 1752, and November 3, 1752

his *Covent-Garden Journal*. We have also mentioned the paper by Bonnel Thornton, whose full title was *Have At You All, or The Drury Lane Journal, By Madam Roxana Termagant. Address'd to Sir Alexander Drawcansir, Author of the Covent Garden Journal*. Thornton, the wit who later became one of the writers of the more respectable essay series called *The Connoisseur* and a member of Dr. Johnson's circle, in this noisy and scurrilous paper joined in the war upon Fielding, but also turned upon Hill and upon Garrick. In the midst of the warfare, however, he also wrote some essays in theatrical criticism which have more than polemic quality in them. He greeted the production of *Harlequin Sorcerer* with an ironical summary of the details of the pantomime and its staging, heaping up the minutiae until it was clear that he despised this substitute for drama.<sup>20</sup> He wrote in the next issue "Observations on the New Tragedy"—*Eugenia* by Philip Francis—with praise for the simplicity of Francis's style, with suggestions for the development of one of the characters, with remarks about the dénouement and the "moral," and with one excellent paragraph of appreciation for the care which he declared Shakespeare must have taken in working up his "capital scenes." On March 19 he printed "Some Reflections on the Theatres," in which he discussed Quin's playing of Falstaff and was thus led on to a complaint of the disgraceful neglect by the public of Shakespeare for Harlequin and to a eulogy of the great actors now playing the London theatres. In the thirteenth and last number, on April 9, is an essay "On the Modern Art and Mystery of Puffing." Later in the year a periodical so much like the *Drury Lane Journal* that it is attributed also to Bonnel Thornton began to be published. This was the *Spring-Garden Journal. By Miss Priscilla Termagant (a near Relation of the Late Mrs. Roxana) Addressed to the Writers of the Age, but more particularly to Sir Alexander Drawcansir, Author of*

<sup>20</sup> *Drury Lane Journal*, No V, February 13, 1752.

*the Covent-Garden Journal.* In No. II, November 23, the author said:

I am far from considering the Theatre a proper Subject for a publick Writer, but as the Oracle of this Age, the *elegant, self-sufficient, and polite Inspector*, has condescended to admit Theatrical Disputes into his communicative Papers of Instruction, no one can wonder, that a weak, frail Woman, apt to be drawn aside by the *Inspector's* assumed Learning and Superiority in Wisdom, to all other Members of the Creation, espouses what she is partly conscious is an Error.

Apparently it was still not considered entirely proper for journalists to give much attention to theatrical affairs. Yet in her first number the week before, "Priscilla" had given a criticism of Ben Jonson's *Silent Woman*, which had been revived. The criticism included the story of the play, a condemnation of the character of Morose as quite unnatural, a query as to why Garrick should have revived the play, and a few remarks upon the opportunities in the play for the acting of Shuter and Palmer. And in the last part of No. II there is some discussion of the current squabbles in the theatres over the hiring of Maddox the acrobat, and over the shameful treatment of Woodward the actor by bullies in the pit led by one Fitzpatrick. Such journals as these, however, can have little influence upon the trend of regular journalism, for they are ephemeral publications set up for the purpose of carrying on a particular warfare.

This decade saw the publication of a number of periodicals in the tradition of the *Spectator* which have literary merit second only to that of their famous model. The first of these was the *Rambler* by Dr. Samuel Johnson (No. 1, March 20, 1750, to No. 208, March 14, 1752). Johnson's lack of interest in the contemporary drama and his often expressed contempt for the art of acting, even in the face of the genius of his friend Garrick, are reasons enough for the absence from this periodical of any discussions of the contemporary theatre. Johnson also assisted in the next of these essay series, the *Adventurer*, chiefly written

by Dr. John Hawkesworth (No. 1, November 7, 1752, to No. 140, March 9, 1754). The critical papers in the *Adventurer* were written by Joseph Warton. Warton, however, gave his attention to literary problems not associated with the theatre, even in his discussions of Shakespeare's plays. Before the *Adventurer* came to an end Edward Moore, the Earl of Chesterfield, the Earl of Cork, Richard Owen Cambridge, and some other writers had launched a new periodical, the *World* (No. 1, January 4, 1753, to No. 209, December 30, 1756). In No. 6, for February 8, 1753, contributed by Horace Walpole, we first meet references to the theatre:

As you have chosen the whole world for your province, one may reasonably suppose, that you will not neglect the epitome of it, the theatre. Most of your predecessors have bestowed their favourite pains upon it; the learned and the critics, generally two very distinct denominations of men, have employed many hours and much paper in comparing the ancient and modern stage.

Walpole then goes on in a delicious vein of irony to ridicule the attempts then being made in the theatre to get a more perfect realism in scenery and stage properties, as in the use of real water for waterfalls and of geese as the nearest thing to swans! In No. 9, March 1, Edward Moore, in the same ironical vein, attacks the pantomime and tries to shame Garrick out of following the fashion towards such spectacles. He returns to the same attack in No. 43, October 25, ironically crying out for "bigger and better" pantomimes. Only two more papers in the whole four years of the *World*'s existence were concerned with drama or the theatre: No. 98, November 14, 1754, by Lord Chesterfield, ridiculing the taste for Italian opera, and No. 171, a year and a half later, April 8, 1756, by an unknown author, defending Italian opera, especially as written by Metastasio, and defending it by the sympathetic analysis of the nature of such performances. When Bonnel Thornton and George Colman set up the *Connoisseur*, under the pseudonym of "Mr. Town, Critic and Censor-General," they wrote in their declaration of purpose:

Wherever the World is, I am. You will therefore hear of me sometimes at the theatres, sometimes, perhaps, at the opera; nor shall I think the exhibitions of Sadler's Wells, or the Little Theatre in the Haymarket beneath my notice; but may one day or other give a dissertation upon tumbling, or, if they should again become popular, a critique on dogs and monkeys<sup>21</sup>

Yet in but a few of the one hundred and forty numbers of the *Connoisseur* was anything approaching theatrical criticism included. In one of those innumerable dream allegories which the periodical essayists since Addison loved so well we find a paragraph which allegorizes the fate of plays and operas recently seen on the stage.<sup>22</sup> "Mr. Town" in this dream sees literature as a vast ocean on which ships sail:

"Cast a look," resumed my instructor, "on that vast lake divided into two parts, which lead to yonder magnificent structures, erected by the tragic and comic Muse. There you may observe many trying to force a passage without chart or compass. Some have been overset by crowding too much sail, and others have foundered by carrying too much ballast. An Arcadian vessel [*Philoclea*,<sup>23</sup> a tragedy; founded on Sir Philip Sydney's *Arcadia*], the master an Irishman, was, through contrary squalls, scarce able to live nine days; but you see that light Italian gondola, *Gli Amanti gelosi* [an admired burletta], skims along pleasantly before the wind, and outstrips the painted frigates of her country, *Didone* and *Artaserse*<sup>24</sup> [operas]. Observe that triumphant squadron, to whose flag all the others pay homage. Most of them are ships of the first rate, and were fitted out many years ago. Though somewhat irregular in their make, and but little conformable to the exact rules of art, they will ever con-

<sup>21</sup> The *Connoisseur*, No 1, January 31, 1754.

<sup>22</sup> The *Connoisseur*, No 3, February 14, 1754

<sup>23</sup> This play by M'Namara Morgan was produced at Covent Garden, January 22, 1754.

<sup>24</sup> *Gli Amanti gelosi*, a comic opera by G Giordani, music by G Cocchi, was produced at Covent Garden, December 17, 1753, *Didone Abbandonata*, altered from Metastasio, music by V. Ciampi, at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket, January 5, 1754; and *Artaserse*, also altered from Metastasio, music by G A. Hasse, at the same theatre, January 29

tinue the pride and glory of these seas; for as it is remarked by the present laureat in his prologue to Papal Tyranny,

Shakespeare, whose art no playwright can excel,  
Has launched us fleets of plays, and built them well

The Earl of Cork contributed No. 23, July 4, 1754, an interesting account of a company of strolling players, which anticipated Hazlitt's essays on the minor theatres and on strolling players in the *London Magazine*, 1820. In No. 34, September 19, 1754, "Mr. Town" translated and defined *jeu de theatre* and continued:

As the playhouses are now opened, I cannot better introduce the remarks which I may sometimes take occasion to make on the theatrical world, than by throwing together a few reflections on this "juggle of the theatre"; which at present I shall consider chiefly as it relates to the actors.

He then compared the older manner of acting with the more natural manner which had lately been introduced, praised the actors for the reformation, suggested that all evils had not yet been done away with, urged upon the actors a greater propriety in dress and pointed out a few details in the acting and costuming of Garrick which seemed to him faulty. This is a really excellent essay on some details of the theatrical arts, but it stands alone in the files of this periodical. There is a lively description of the audiences in No. 43, November 21, 1754, and in No. 47, December 19, some ridicule of pantomime. When, in his next to last paper (No. 139, September 23, 1756), "Mr. Town" surveys the influence which he has been able to exert through his papers, he has to make the following admission:

I have not been able to write operas out of the kingdom; and, though I have more than once showed my contempt for Harlequin, I am assured there are no less than three pantomimes to be brought on this season. As I invested myself with the dignity of supreme judge in theatrical matters, I was in hopes that my Lord Chamberlain would at least have appointed me his Deputy-Licensor; but he has not even consulted me on any one new play. I made no doubt but the managers would pay their court to me; but they have not

once sent for me to dinner; and, so far from having the freedom of the house, I declare I have not had so much as a single order from any of the under-actors.

A much less important paper than any of these, from a purely literary point of view, showed more signs of adopting theatrical criticism regularly. In stating his designs for his periodical, "Oxymel Busby," in the *Scourge*, No. 1, November 28, 1752, said:

The Business of the *Theatre* will also come under my Eye; and as the Inhabitants thereof are manifestly the Servants of the Public (while they are paid for it) without Scruple, whenever they deserve it, they shall have my Lash.

The author, according to his promise, criticized the new plays which were brought out during this season.<sup>25</sup> The criticism consisted, however, of bare summaries of the plots, and then pedantic examination of the plays by certain standards of judgment which can be seen in the following statement:

The first thing to be considered in a dramatic piece is the moral This our author<sup>26</sup> hath well adhered to, every action conduced to inculcate an abhorrence of gaming, therefore no defect can be found here.

The next consideration is the manner how the poet's design is to be executed, and those, who judge best, say the unities of action, time, and place are essential. That the characters are to be contrasted, distinguished and uniform That the diction should be decent, apt, and strong. That nothing puerile or foreign to the purpose should be introduced, and that action and narration should be intermixed with judgment, since it would be highly absurd either to see all or hear all.

Now let us consider this Tragedy by the help of these rules and see how it squares with them.

The result can be imagined. "Upon the whole the Gamester must be looked upon as an excellent moral play, but having some

<sup>25</sup> See the *Scourge*, December 12, 1752, on *Don Sebastian* (revival); December 28, on *The Genii*; February 13 and 15, on *The Gamester*; February 27, 1753, on *The Earl of Essex*; and March 6, on *The Brothers*.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Moore: *The Gamester*. The *Scourge*, February 15, 1753.

faults." In such criticism there is no freshness of touch which might have come from seeing the play in the theatre and no sign of release from the most rigid pseudo-classic canons of criticism. It is characteristic of "Oxymel Busby," and we leave him.<sup>27</sup>

More fruitful by far than our examination of these periodicals is a study of the *Gray's Inn Journal* which was published by Arthur Murphy (No. 1, October 21, 1752, to October 12, 1754). Murphy had been born in Ireland in 1727, educated at the English College at St Omer, France, engaged as merchant's clerk at Cork from 1747 to 1749, and the next two years as clerk in a banking house in London. His companionship with the frequenters of theatres and coffee-houses in London led him to make his first venture into literature, the *Gray's Inn Journal*. While it was in progress he met the disappointment of failing to get a legacy from an uncle whom he had offended. To relieve himself of his debts he went on the stage—his début coincided with the close of the *Gray's Inn Journal*, in October, 1754. He acted for about three years when he retired with his debts all paid. He had begun to write farces for the stage, the beginning of a long career as writer of comedies, farces, and tragedies. Through his political journalism he gained the friendship of Charles James Fox and Lord Mansfield and was admitted to Lincoln's Inn, and subsequently practiced before the bar. He was a friend of Dr. Johnson<sup>28</sup> and of Samuel Rogers, and lived on into the next century. His articles in the *Gray's Inn Journal* may not have been his only contribution to theatrical criticism, for he, as we shall see, may have been the author of the more distinguished series of critiques in the *London Chronicle* in 1757 and 1758.<sup>29</sup>

*The Gray's Inn Journal*, by Charles Ranger, Esq., offers a

<sup>27</sup> The *Scourge* continued to No. 81, June 2, 1753

<sup>28</sup> For his relations with Dr. Johnson see Beatty, J. M., "Dr. Johnson and 'Mur,'" *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 39, p. 82-88 (February, 1924).

<sup>29</sup> See *Dictionary of National Biography* and sources cited there.

problem for the bibliographer. The first forty-five numbers were printed in a newspaper called the *Craftsman*,<sup>30</sup> which was apparently a continuation of the old *Craftsman* (later the *Country Journal or Craftsman*) which had been published by Nicholas Amherst between 1729 and 1736 (or later), under the pseudonym of "Caleb D'Anvers."<sup>31</sup> No file of the *Craftsman* for 1752 or 1753 can at present, it appears, be found. The only form in which these early essays can be read, then, is the revised and enlarged form in the later reprints of the whole series. On September 29, 1753, Murphy published the first separate number of the *Gray's Inn Journal* and thereafter a series consisting of fifty-two issues altogether (numbered 50, 51, 52, 4 to 52). In 1756 an octavo edition of the whole *Journal* was published in two volumes, containing one hundred and four numbers, the first and last essays being the No. 1 and the No. 52 of the separately published series. There are many differences and additions in the reprints. For our study we may look at the series which ran from September 29, 1753, to September 21, 1754, and then make any necessary additions from the revised essays as they are to be read in the reprint.

In the first number, September 29, 1753 (called No. 50) under "True Intelligence, Registry Office," "Ranger" wrote:

Though a Royal Patent has made a Monopoly of the two Theatres, I intend to be Manager of both, and in this Office I shall conduct myself with the strictest Impartiality.

In the criticisms which follow, however, there is a tendency to-

<sup>30</sup> At least so says Lowndes.

<sup>31</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol XXXIII, p 443. "The *Gray's-Inn Journal*, printed on a sheet and a half of fine paper, like the *Rambler*, *Adventurer*, and *The World*,—for W. Faden, Fleet-street; and J Bouquet, Paternoster row, Pr 2 d No. 50 (the former numbers having been in the *Craftsman*) by Charles Ranger, Esq ; who declares he has left Mr D'Anvers and politics" A reprint of an earlier *Gray's Inn* paper in the same volume of the *Gentleman's Magazine* (p. 182), however, is headed "*From The Gray's Inn Journal Or Craftsman*, April 21 "

wards a preference for the work of Garrick at Drury Lane. Murphy wrote frequent notes of news about the theatres. Nearly every issue contained some report. The essays which can be called criticisms were interspersed among the essays on general topics. It was these essays which gained the respect of Dr. Johnson, especially those on Shakespeare. "Doctor Johnson had commended Mr. Murphy's essay in the *Gray's Inn Journal*, upon the afflicting cause of the madness of King Lear, and Mr. Murphy would not be backward in acknowledging such an honour done him by such a man."<sup>32</sup> Murphy's biographer was even daring enough to couple the names of the two still more closely, for he said of them, "The one had been Shakespeare's Commentator for the Other."<sup>33</sup>

Murphy declared the greatness of any dramatic genius to consist first of all in the ability to create character; he was thus turning definitely away from the neo-classic creed founded on Aristotle. In the field of characterization Shakespeare could be held up as unrivaled; the critic who would save him from the Voltaireans could take up a secure stand there and let the arguments about the plots pass by undisputed. In a "Letter to Voltaire" in answer to the celebrated passage in the *Dissertation sur la tragédie ancienne et moderne*, preface to *Semiramis*, which described *Hamlet* as the work of a drunken savage, Murphy not only declared that Shakespeare was "a kind of established Religion in Poetry" and that "his Bays will always flourish with undiminished Verdure," but he placed his defense upon something over and above the "rules" which admittedly Shakespeare had "transgressed"; he affirmed a new doctrine:

But Fable is but a secondary Beauty; the Exhibition of Character, and the Excitement of the Passions, justly claiming the Precedence in dramatic Poetry.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Foot, Jesse: *Life of Arthur Murphy, Esq., London*, 1811, p. 312. (Quoted by Beatty, *op. cit.*)

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

<sup>34</sup> *Gray's Inn Journal*, No. 12, December 15, 1753. See also No. 20

In his criticism of *Macbeth* he set aside the enchantment motif, as something which would go down in the credulous days of Elizabeth, but expressed profound admiration for the theme of the intoxication of power and the spectacle of the rapid progress of vice, and even for the solemnity of the incantations of the Weird Sisters. And he singled out separate scenes for comment.<sup>35</sup> Two papers by Joseph Warton in the *Adventurer* (Nos. 113 and 116, December 4 and 15, 1753) on the play of *King Lear* called forth from Murphy two papers on the madness of Lear, which were those which interested Dr. Johnson. He wished the emphasis, among the causes of Lear's madness, to be placed on the sense of the ingratitude of his daughters rather than upon the loss of the crown and power of royalty. In these criticisms of Shakespeare, Murphy nearly always referred to the acting of Garrick, which was for men of his day one of the best sources of commentary upon the characters. All through there were short comments upon other performers.<sup>36</sup> He was also interested in the principles of acting, and in two papers discussed that art. First of all he advised an actor to observe men and manners, to study the human heart, to watch for the actions which grow out of emotions, and observe the shiftings in men's souls. Such things had such great players as Garrick and Mrs. Cibber done.<sup>37</sup> Coming to more particular things, he laid down a system of rules for actors: be attentive to the business of the scene; be perfect in the part and do not interpolate; do not exaggerate actions to grimace; commit stage murders without being comical, do not make jibes at gentlemen going to the Green Room; act the gentleman before going on the stage and while on the stage, and thus be taken for a gentleman; get into no ruffianlike, gang manners in the coffee-houses.<sup>38</sup> His comments on other plays besides Shake-

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 8, November 17.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Nos. 16 and 17, January 12 and 19, 1754.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 4, October 20, 1753.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 7, November 10, 1753.

speare's were few and brief. He had a clear theory of comedy, which approached the French theory rather than the practice of Shakespeare; he believed comedy to be the highest form of literature, and he stressed the intellectual element in it, the corrective ridicule of folly.<sup>39</sup> It is to be wished that Murphy had made a combination of the interesting critical essays which he wrote on these general and specific topics with the regular reports of the current affairs in the theatres. The essayist and reporter did not fuse. In the reprinted *Journal* of 1756 there were interpolated many humorous jibes at pantomime, acrobatics, and animal performers, but little of criticism. Murphy found that his writings had made his way as an actor rather thorny, and consequently he had to make public announcement, about 1755, that he had not written anything in any periodical since the close of the *Gray's Inn Journal*.<sup>40</sup> This does not hinder us from suspecting that he did take up the writing of criticism for the *London Chronicle* in 1757. His work on the *Gray's Inn Journal* is perhaps but the preliminary to that more significant writing.

The *Entertainer*, by Charles Mercury, Esq. (No. I, September 3, 1754, to No. XII, November 19, 1754), contained occasional remarks about happenings at the theatres, and in No. VII a letter from "Shakespeare" asking "Mercury" to save his plays from the commentators by explaining passages from them once in a while. In the same number began short notes from each playhouse, which were continued regularly and were increased in length until the paper ceased to be published.

With Paul Hiffernan's short-lived venture, the *Tuner* (Letter I, January 21, 1754, to Letter V, some time in 1755), we again come to the work of a man, who, like Arthur Murphy, was particularly interested in the theatre. Hiffernan had been educated as a physician but had made no success in the profession. While

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 49, August 21, 1754.

<sup>40</sup> Boaden, James *Private Correspondence of David Garrick*, Vol I, p xxx.

still in Dublin, he had become interested in theatrical matters and had taken occasion to write criticism in his periodical, the *Tickler* (c. 1748). He had here attacked Thomas Sheridan for his acting and for his conduct of the Theatre Royal in Dublin. His own coarse and scurrilous style drew forth answers in the same style, and one of the pamphlets makes him say, as he is supposed to be lying on his deathbed,

Next I implore forgiveness from Mr Sheridan, and confess that my only motive for abusing him as I have done, was his rejecting a vile performance of mine, and refusing to make me free of the House as a Writer, a Character I have always asserted with the utmost Impudence and Petulance<sup>41</sup>

He brought these qualities to London in 1753 and very shortly afterwards put them to use in the *Tuner*. Letter I began with discussion of the "Jew Bill," of the Marriage Act, and of current periodicals in London. Then followed short descriptions of some of the actors, including Macklin and Garrick. Then there came an elaborate, but loose and ineffectual, discussion of Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty*, and an attempt to apply the principles to drama. He then reviewed Richard Glover's tragedy *Boadicia* and M'Namara Morgan's tragedy *Philoclea*. His method was to use the test of common sense in a most sarcastic spirit, and to dissect the piece line by line, reducing the sentiment to the absurd, and throughout to insist upon the "rules" of drama. In the same merciless way, in Letter II, March 5, he attacked Henry Crisp's tragedy *Virginia* and Philip Francis's *Constantine*. Letter III again snarled at some current periodicals. It also puffed a projected work of Hiffernan's called *The Hibernian*. Then it gave some observations on recently revived plays, Addison's

<sup>41</sup> "A Faithful Narrative of the Barbarous and Bloody Murder of P—L H—FF—N, M D. Committed by himself on Monday the 17th Day of October Inst. Being a LETTER from Mr. R—d D—ck—n of S—l—r C—t Castle-Street, Dublin, to J—n B—ne, Esq at the Hague." (1748) British Museum. See also "The Marrow of the Tickler's Works, or Three Shillings worth of Wit for a Penny. In a Ballad." (By Scriblerus) 1748.

comedy *The Drummer*, and Edmund Smith's *Phaedra and Hippolitus*. Hiffernan's critical judgment is shown in his remarks about *Phaedra and Hippolitus*, which he called one of the most elegantly written tragedies in English, but declared that it was better for reading than for production on the stage, because of the amount of pure declamation which it contains. In his criticism he tried to put himself imaginatively into the scenes which he was discussing and to describe the important characters. He was particularly interested in the problem before the actor who would interpret these characters. "Phaedra," he said, at her first Appearance on the Stage, is to excite in the Spectators, the Idea of a sublime Melancholy, and tacit Heart-gnawing An-guish . . .

These Sallies of a sick Mind  
"Come, let's away, etc"  
and  
"I'll to the woods, etc"

are but fugitive Rays of an affected Joy, soon sunk into, and absorb'd by, the prevailing Gloominess of the Mind . . .

Therefore no wild Flights, no ridiculous Starts, no dissonant Screaming, no absurd Swinging of the Arms, no limber Sinking of the Hams, no awkward Writhing of the Neck, no disgusting Blubberings of Passion, no Mrs. Tatoo's Stamping on the Stage. Such Proceeding would be abominable and betray a total Ignorance of the Meaning of the Part.

The Passion of Joy, in these Instances, is but transient, and quite subordinate; tending chiefly to make her consummate Grief the more apparent

The characteristic exuberance and violence of language in this passage is matched by Hiffernan's later remarks about the two performances of *Coriolanus*, that at Covent Garden of a mixture of Thomson and Shakespeare concocted probably by Thomas Sheridan,<sup>42</sup> and that at Drury Lane of a shortened version of Shakespeare's own text:

<sup>42</sup> See Odell, G. C. D. *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, Vol. I, p. 355.

The original *Coriolanus* as played at *Drury Lane* Theatre, is the most mobbing, huzzaing, shewy, boasting, drumming, fighting, trumpeting Tragedy I ever saw: . . . As exhibited in *Covent-Garden* it is the divine but nodding *Shakespear*, put into his Night-Gown by Messire *Thomson*; and humm'd to Sleep by *Don Torpedo*, infamous for the Mezentian Art of joining his *Dead* to the *Living*: For which he is most justly damned.

The Roman Mother of one House, the Gentlemen declare for; the Ladies for that of the other And the Generality of Spectators in behalf of the young Warrior.

One Use this *Tara-tantara Belli* Drama may be applied to, is (that as the *London Cuckolds* are politely dismissed from the Stage) it may be annually performed, to conclude the Triumph of the *Lord-Mayor's* Day; and with more Propriety than *Tamerlane* is on the Anniversary of King William: Of which absurd Conduct the Truest Censure is, the Neglect of the Public to see it.

In the other two numbers of the *Tuner* there are similar discussions of theatrical matters and some slight criticism of plays and actors. It is not always clear what Hiffernan's marvelous jumbles of words mean, and doubtless usually not worth trying very hard to find out. At any rate his contemporaries took notice of him. He had a few farces produced in the theatres and became friendly with Garrick. When his farce, *Maiden Whim*, was to be performed at Drury Lane, on April 24, 1756, he felt it advisable to write a letter to the Printer of the *Public Advertiser* to forestall unfriendly criticism:

Let this suffice for a general answer to all unfriendly whispers or paragraphs against the new Farce to be performed to-night at Drury Lane—its author never previously caballed, never published his sentiments of any stage performance till after the run—then neither the writer nor manager could be injured . . . <sup>43</sup>

After a number of years as a Grub-Street hack writer, during which it is suspected that he won Garrick's friendship through the writing of favorable criticisms of his acting, he seems to have received a pension from Garrick. What others thought of him is

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Genest: *Some Account of the English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830*, Vol IV, p. 457.

suggested by the words of Samuel Foote in a letter remonstrating with Garrick for his encouragement of such a fellow, "who, without parts, principles, property, or profession, has subsisted for these twenty years by the qualities of a literary foot-pad."<sup>44</sup> In 1770 Hiffernan dedicated to Garrick his book, *Dramatic Genius, in Five Books*, which is an absurd farrago of prose and verse about theatrical matters, with the chief emphasis upon the great qualities of Garrick as an actor. And when the journalistic snipers were pelting Garrick with coarse epigrams in 1772, especially in the *Morning Chronicle*, it was common to link with his name the name of "gallows Paul," who was, furthermore, supposed by his enemies to be the author of all the epigrams which retorted upon Garrick's defamers. The *Tuner*, however, remains his best contribution to theatrical criticism, though it cannot be said to have done much either to enliven or to dignify the profession.

The other essay periodicals of the period were either devoted entirely to politics, like the *Monitor*, 1775, the *Protester*, 1753, the *Test*, and the *Con-Test*, 1756, or to essays on general topics of morals and manners, like the *Student*, 1750-51, the *Midwife*, 1750-53, the *Old Maid*, 1755, *Man*, 1755, and the *Humanist*, 1757. Neither of these types of periodical contained theatrical criticism.

The really great step in the development of theatrical criticism in this decade was made with the founding of the *London Chronicle*, in 1757, by Robert Dodsley. No. 1 of this thrice-a-week newspaper, with a preliminary article by Samuel Johnson, was published on January 1, 1757. Boswell in recording the fact of Johnson's participation in the venture comments upon the character of the paper:

This *Chronicle* still subsists, and from what I observed, when I was abroad, has a more extensive circulation on the Continent than any of the English newspapers It was constantly read by Johnson

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<sup>44</sup> See Forster, John *Life of Oliver Goldsmith*, Book IV, Chap III (Jefferson Edition, Vol. III, p. 137). Forster has given a vivid description of the life which Hiffernan probably led in London during these years.

himself; and it is but just to observe, that it has all along been distinguished for good sense, accuracy, moderation and delicacy.<sup>45</sup>

Dodsley did not remain long in connection with the *Chronicle*, however, because he objected to the policy of quoting from scurilous pamphlets and withdrew from the partnership on January 24, 1757. William Strahan was the printer of the paper, and a certain Spens the editor.<sup>46</sup> The contents included "Foreign Transactions," "Country News," "Ship News," extracts from the essay papers like the *Monitor*, the *Test*, and *Con-Test*, "Account of Books," and a "Postscript" of late news. On January 20, 1757—the paper is of course dated January 18-20—the "Postscript" carried a letter "To the Authors of the *Chronicle*" which praised the new periodical and rightly considered that its files would be important sources of information in future years about the manners of the times. But the writer, who signed himself "Tragiconicus," found one fault with the paper:

One Part of your Plan is, I think, defective. It will conduce very little to the Advancement of true Knowledge, to inform future Times that such a Play was acted at Drury Lane, and such a one at Covent Garden. I could wish to see a short Analysis of every Play, with a summary Account of its Merit or Deficiency, and whether it owes its Reception to Character, Wit, or Humour, and Incident combined, or to any of these Requisites detached from the rest. If to this were added by whom each Play was written, when first produced, and what Degree of Success it met with, it would prove an agreeable and not unentertaining Part of your Paper, more particularly if accompanied with Criticisms on the Acting, not calculated to give Pain to the Performer, but derived from the Source of Nature, Taste, and Good Sense.

This is an excellent statement of the business of the theatrical critic, which we wish might have been made to earlier publishers of newspapers in London. "Tragiconicus" continues:

<sup>45</sup> Boswell, James: *Life of Samuel Johnson, LL D.* (Ed. by Henry Morley), 1891, Vol. I, p. 238.

<sup>46</sup> Straus, Ralph: *Robert Dodsley, Poet, Publisher, and Playwright*, 1910, pp. 96-97.

If you agree with me in this Matter (as you certainly must) I will with Pleasure undertake that Department: And I therefore desire you will order a new Type of the following Letters in Capitals, T, H, E, A, T, R, E; being resolved to convey all Intelligence of this Nature under the Title of *THE THEATRE*, which I would have placed in some conspicuous Part of the Chronicle, to be reserved in all your future Publications for my Criticisms, without being ever preoccupied by Letters from the Hague, or any Topic whatever.

In the next issue of the *Chronicle*, January 20-22, accordingly, we find "*THE THEATRE*, No. 1." From that time until April 19, nearly every issue of the paper contains this department. In "*THE THEATRE*, No. 34," April 16-19, the critic writes,

We shall only add, that for the future, when Repetitions of the same Plays come quick upon us, we shall not open our Theatre merely to mention them, as this Paper is now crowded with Matter, but shall have the Space to be filled with something more valuable than the trivial Information that such and such Plays were acted.

Whether because of this being "crowded with Matter" or not, this number of "*THE THEATRE*" closed the series.<sup>47</sup> In the issue for November 26-29 there is a letter from "Th. C.," expressing regret that the articles on the theatre have been so long discontinued and offering himself as critic for the future. A new series consequently began in the next issue, November 29-December 1. But on December 6 there is a repetition of the heading "*The Theatre, No. 1.*" The piece which follows is obviously by the original *Chronicle* critic of the season before, for he apologizes for the appearance in his paper of the letter from "Th. C." which had criticized Mossop so unfavorably and he explains that the letter was printed by accident. He then writes, in order to counteract the effect of that letter, a bit of extravagant praise for Mossop. No. 2 appears on December 6-8. In No. 3, December 8-10, the critic signs himself "Philomuse" and promises that in his next article he will tell of his qualifications as a judge of the drama and that frequently thereafter he will write upon the prin-

<sup>47</sup> In all there were thirty-seven papers in the series; an error in numbering had been made

ciples of taste and on the "mode of judging." On December 10-13, however, the *Chronicle* has a note: "The sudden indisposition of the Gentleman who favoured us with the Observations on the Theatres, obliges us to postpone that Article in our Paper till he be recovered." The articles are not resumed, until in the issue of October 3-5, 1758, again appears "The Theatre, No. 1." This new series continues in almost every issue until No. 6, in the issue of October 19-21. Nearly three weeks later, November 7-9, there appears a letter "To the Printer of the Chronicle."

SIR,

Your late correspondent on the Theatre, having dropt you all of a sudden, and that in the midst of some novel and very interesting performances, I take it for granted we are not to have the pleasure of hearing from him any more, and as I know this will be a great disappointment to many of your readers, if you think me capable of supplying his place, I shall follow the two subsequent essays with the like number upon the same subject, on each of your days of publication: And as the *King's Theatre in the Hay-Market* will speedily open, I shall endeavour to entertain your readers with some observations on, and account of the several New Operas, as they appear: considering each under the different heads of Poetry, Musick, Decorations, and Performance I am yours and your readers' humble servant,

N. S.

This letter prefaces "The Theatre, No. 7," the resumption of the series under the direction of this new critic, "N. S." The series then runs on to No. 11, November 18-21, and then to three more, without numbers, the last appearing in the issue of December 19-21. In the midst of the series a correspondent, "Atticus," wrote (November 18-21) to the publisher to complain of the tone of almost universal approbation given by the *Chronicle* critic to plays and players and to express the hope that the critic will be more careful to discriminate in the future, neither flattering nor being, on the other hand, ungentlemanly. "Atticus" suggests the whole duty of the critic:

Indeed, if the art be developed; the rule of just imitation established, the rise and process of each passion explained; the beauties of

a well complicated fable pointed out, the touches of character rendered still more pleasing to the intelligent, and palpable to the unfeeling, if it be remarked where poetry, sentiment, and passion are assembled by the poet, and where the actor catches the flame from him, and glows with a natural warmth: in short, if nature be explained in her secret workings, by a judicious critic, and new lights be let in upon the mind of the reader, then indeed the *Chronicle* may receive advantage and reputation.

Then he offers to write "occasional animadversions . . . with Independent Spirit and with Truth." Only one of these "animadversions," however, was forthcoming—a letter, December 2-5, with enthusiastic praise of Dodsley's tragedy *Cleone* and of Mrs. Bellamy's acting in it. After the regular series closed on December 21, 1758, the *Chronicle* almost entirely neglected the theatre until 1766. But the criticisms of 1757 and 1758 form the best writings about drama and acting which have been seen in the periodicals since those of Steele.

While it is possible in a great many instances to identify the authors of the unsigned articles in newspapers, the authorship of these *Chronicle* articles has eluded all search. The only clue seems to be a guess of Samuel Johnson's as to the authorship of a note of introduction to his proposals for his edition of Shakespeare, published in the *London Chronicle*, April 12-14, 1757. Johnson said in a letter to Mr. Burney in 1758: "The proposals you will disseminate as there shall be an opportunity. I once printed them at length in the *Chronicle*, and some of my friends (I believe Mr. Murphy, who formerly wrote the *Gray's Inn Journal*) introduced them with a splendid encomium."<sup>48</sup> As these proposals were published in an issue in the midst of a series of "The Theatre" there is just a possibility that Murphy was also the author of that series. In No. 17 of "The Theatre," February 26-March 1, in the midst of "Remarks on Macbeth," the critic quoted from Samuel Johnson's *Miscellaneous Observations on*

<sup>48</sup> Boswell, James. *Life of Dr. Samuel Johnson* (Ed. G. Birkbeck Hill), Vol I, p. 379.

*the Tragedy of Macbeth*, which, he said, had been “published some time since by Mr. Johnson, as a Specimen of a new Edition of Shakespear, which we have the Pleasure to inform our Readers, he is now about. From his Erudition and Genius we may expect to see our great Dramatic Poet restored to us in his Habit as he lived.”

In this series of criticisms it is possible to see a man at work feeling his way into a new profession. He soon discovers that writing this sort of criticism is not quite the same thing as writing formal critical essays upon plays which have been published and read frequently in the quiet of the study. As he writes he makes comments upon the task before him. He refuses to write about a play which he has not seen, and in doing so accuses his fellow journalists of something less than his honesty. There are enough instances of absentee-reviewing discoverable in the files of these newspapers to justify his slur.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, he refuses at times to write about a new play until it has been published. In the instance, however, of the popular tragedy, *Douglas*, while he wishes to read the play before passing final judg-

<sup>49</sup> George Anne Bellamy told a story about Dr John Hill which is a sample of some of the practices. Hill had praised her performance as Juliet in his critiques “Upon my return to Covent Garden, he one evening swam into the Green-Room, during the representation of that play, and when I was called to go to the balcony, the scene on which he had been most exuberant in his eulogiums, he greatly astonished me by saying, ‘I must go and see it, for I hear it is the finest piece of acting in the whole performance’ I could not resist turning back to ask him if he had not wrote a critique upon it? To which he replied, with a becoming *non chalence* [sic], that he had written it from what he had heard at the Bedford, and never till that evening had an opportunity of seeing it.” Miss Bellamy’s conclusions upon the honesty of the journalists follow: “Indeed I believe most of the praise or censure we read in the papers, is put in by the partizans or enemies of the performers; except in new pieces, when the editors think it their duty to give the public, with an account of the performance, the merits or demerits of the actors and actresses” *Apology for the Life of George Anne Bellamy*, 1785, Vol. IV, p 184

ment upon it, he apparently feels the pressure of the newspaper readers upon him and prefaces his remarks with a delightful statement of the creed of the impressionistic critic: "We cannot, at present, pretend to give an exact Critique on this Piece, but a short History of our own Affections, while under his Operation, is in our Power, and that we beg leave to offer to the Public." In this same fresh and original spirit he discusses Addison's *Cato*, refusing merely to fall in with "fashionable criticism" which decries that play. In his criticism of new actors and actresses he shows the friendliest of feeling. When Barry essays Richard III, the critic withholds judgment until he has seen him more than once, lest his first impression be unfair because of the nervousness under which Barry naturally labored in the first performance. When favorite actors of his, Mossop and Garrick, are assailed in a pamphlet, the critic can turn from his chaste style of criticism and in good pamphleteering billingsgate denounce the "Cibberian" author. In these ways we are able to see the man approaching his task and insisting on writing from a very personal point of view. It is this point of view which makes his criticisms so much more interesting than much of the "judicial" criticism which will be found in his successors.

In his criticism of plays this critic is very much concerned with the moral tone and his judgments are interesting examples of the tastes of intelligent people of the mid-eighteenth century. He finds *Love for Love* immoral and rather mildly censures it. The famous scene in *The Careless Husband*, where the curtain rises upon Sir Charles Easy and the maid, Edging, asleep in chairs side by side, is declared to be indelicate. *The Provoked Wife* is found immoral because Vanbrugh allowed the wife to retaliate upon the husband with infidelity instead of rising nobly above the provocation—wives should not have suggested to them such unorthodox (and effective) methods! Again, in *The Beaux Stratagem* the ending in divorce shocks the sensibility of this very orthodox critic, who calls the separation of Mr. and Mrs.

Sullen very "unnatural," for he had not caught the spirit of Farquhar's criticism of the marriage conventions. The bed-chamber scene in *The Orphan* by Otway "raises Ideas too coarse for the Refinement of the Tragic Muse"; from the example of Virgil the critic argues that the poet should throw "a transparent Veil over his Lovers through which we discover enough, without having the whole too glaringly displayed to view." The climax of this censure of the indelicacy of many of the plays in the regular eighteenth-century repertoire came in the critic's onslaughts upon Mrs. Behn's comedy, *The Rover*, which he eventually claimed to have driven from the boards—though it must be observed that the revival had doubtless already more than justified the managers' expenditures. The criticism is a piece of lively comic writing on its own account:

Mr. Pope has passed a very just Censure on this Writer in the two following Lines.

"The Stage how loosely does Astraea tread,  
Who fairly puts all Characters to Bed?"

In the Play before us there is a very remarkable Instance of this putting to Bed. One of the Personages of the Drama takes off his Breeches in the Sight of the Audience, whose Diversion is of a complicated Nature on this Occasion. The Ladies are first alarmed; then the Men stare. The Women put up their Fans—"My Lady Betty, what is the Man about?—Lady Mary, sure he is 'not in earnest!'" Then peep thro' their Fans—"Well, I vow, the He-creature is taking off his odious Breeches—He—he—Po!—is that all?—the Man has Drawers on"—Then, like Mrs. Cadwallador in the new Farce,— "Well, to be sure, I never saw any *Thing* in the Shape of it"—Meantime, the Delight of the Male Part of the Audience is occasioned by the various Operations of this Phoenomenon on the Female Mind—"This is rare Fun, d—n me—Jack, Tom, Bob, did you ever see any thing like this?—Look at that Lady yonder—See, in the Stage Box—how she looks half-averted," &c, &c. It is Matter of Wonder that the Upper Gallery don't call for an Hornpipe, or, "Down with the Drawers," according to their Custom of insisting upon as much as they can get for their Money. But to be a little serious, it should be remembered by all Managers that this Play was written in the dis-

solute Days of Charles the Second; and that Decency at least is, or ought to be, demanded at present.

Yet this critic did not join the hue-and-cry raised by some of the moralists against *The Beggar's Opera*, for he pronounced that opera the "finest Original in our own or perhaps any Language." And a characteristic remark, made in respect to Congreve's *Mourning Bride*, is that it was "on the side of Virtue, and in that Respect, and that only, it is the best of all Mr. Congreve's Plays."

There is within this critic's mind the struggle between the appeal of the strong and noble tragedy of the ancients and the appeal of the sentiment and pathos which were overwhelming drama in his day. He can be glad that Cibber finished Vanbrugh's play, which is now called *The Provoked Husband*, because Cibber gave to it an ending including a sentimental reconciliation. He is quite alive to the power of Otway in domestic tragedy like *The Orphan*, and writes vigorously in defense of that *genre* itself. He is alive to "affecting passages" like his contemporaries. Yet when he criticizes Aaron Hill's version of *Merope*, he is struck with the difference between the nobility of the story in the original versions by Maffei and Voltaire and the "sentimental" rendering of it by Hill. And everywhere in his criticisms we can see growing up that insistence upon the "passions" as the test of the effect of tragedy. It is characteristic of him to say of Nathaniel Lee that "his madness begun to work in him very early, and to this it is owing that he so frequently shakes Hands with Nature, and flies away into the Realms of Chaos and Old Night," and yet to say that a poet like Lee is infinitely preferable to "a cold, correct Writer, who preserves equal Mediocrity throughout" and that in *Theodosius* there are "Beauties enough to furnish out half a dozen modern Tragedies."

It is to be expected then that he will be among those who were saying in his day that Shakespeare should not be held to any set of rules. He quotes David Hume's remark about Shakespeare:

“A striking Peculiarity of Sentiment, adapted to a singular Character, he frequently hits as it were by Inspiration; but a reasonable Propriety of Thought he cannot, for any Time, uphold.” But with the character of Falstaff before him the *Chronicle* critic cannot entirely assent, for he has great affection for Falstaff and feels that the character is sustained admirably throughout. Where Shakespeare has been bound by the sources of his characters, as in the history plays, he “seems upon most Occasions . . . to create the Thoughts of others; Every Thing comes from him with an Air of Originality. When we once forgive him the Violation of all the Rules of the Drama, we must allow that he greatly compensates for this Want of Regularity by very striking Beauties.” The story of Hamlet, as told in the chronicles of Saxo-Grammaticus, “has a very romantic Air; abounds with Improbabilities, and is such altogether as would scarce have struck any Imagination but Shakespeare’s.” But the critic recognizes with enthusiasm what a noble thing Shakespeare has made of the stuff of the old “romantic” tale. His neo-classic prejudices come out, however, in his discussion of the close of this tragedy:

In the original Story the Catastrophe is full of Terror: Amleth, having made the Nobility drunk, set Fire to the Palace, and during the Confusion, goes to the Usurper’s Apartment, and tells him that Amleth was then to revenge his Father’s Death, upon which the King jumping out of Bed, he was instantly put to Death, and Amleth was proclaimed King. The Historian concludes with this Remark. “O brave young Man, who covered more than human Wisdom under the Guise of a Natural, and not only secured his own Safety by that Artifice, but obtained the Means of completely revenging his Father, and it is now left to every Body to judge which was greater, his Bravery or Wisdom.” If Shakespear had not deviated from this Circumstance, he would perhaps have given the finest Scenes of Terror in the last Act that have ever been imagined: and then a Subject that opens so nobly would have been grand also in the Close. As the Play now stands, the Innocent, contrary to Tradition, falls with the Guilty; like the Personage in *Tom Thumb*, all he boasts is, that he

falls the last; and the World is left to judge which is the worst, the Fencing of the Actors, or the Folly of the Poet in introducing it.

The ending of *Romeo and Juliet* he also found less effective than the circumstances as related in the original story and in Otway's *Caius Marius*, where the heroine awakens before the hero is quite dead from the poison, and he approved very highly of Garrick's alteration of this part of Shakespeare's play. The critic's taste was not for the cluttered Elizabethan plays, with their innumerable episodes. Hence he had to temper his praise of *Measure for Measure*, and to praise Garrick for his cutting down and simplifying of *The Winter's Tale* so that "the whole is more compact, Absurdities are retrenched, and our Attention is alive throughout."

The study of Shakespeare's plays as acted by the great actors of that century led many of the theatrical critics to the special study of the characters. The *Chronicle* critic makes some interesting contributions to this study. He writes a glowing paragraph upon the development in Macbeth's character and then calls attention to Shakespeare's treatment of the effects of remorse upon four different characters. In the next issue he gives a whole paper to the comparison of these four characters, Macbeth, Richard III, King John, and Claudius. He had shown a careful reading of the character of Richard III in an earlier paper in which he had discussed the interpretation by Barry. For example he objected to Barry's portrayal of the humorous sallies of Richard:

... the Humour of Richard, which never should take off the Mask, is with him too free and open. Richard's Pleasantry never rises to Mirth; it always proceeds from what the Poet calls the *mala mentis gaudia*, the wicked Pleasures of the Mind; and it should therefore never become totally jocund, but should ever be a mixed Emotion of Joy and Malice. Where he jokes about his Score or two of Taylors, and finds himself a marvelous proper Man, there should be no free Exultation, because his Mirth is ironical, and he is still sensible of his own Deformity; and therefore he should smile, and smile, and be

a villain This should hold all through, except in the triumphant Self-Congratulations of Ambition.

The necessity of the study of character did not, of course, stop with Shakespeare, and we have in the essays in the *Chronicle* excellent interpretations of characters in other plays of the repertoire. A study of Zanga in *The Revenge* by Edward Young leads to a comparison between that Moorish villain and Iago. A discussion of the character of Strictland in *The Suspicious Husband* calls for a comparison with Kitely in *Every Man in His Humour*. The critic is shrewd enough to see the difference between one stage Irishman and another, for he finds Teague in *The Committee* something more than a string of Irish bulls. He carries his demand for character even into his appreciation of the farces and after-pieces, and such characters as Lord Chalkstone in *Lethe* are made to have some life before us.

Much of this character study is found in the descriptions of the art of the actors of the day. The *Chronicle* critic was especially appreciative of the acting of Garrick and Mossop, but he was equally ready to take whatever pleasure the others had to give. He was ready to sympathize with an actor whose lines had nothing of merit in them and hence left him to make what he could of a character through sheer imaginative acting. It was such a performance as this that Mrs. Cibber gave in *The Earl of Essex*. He discriminated nicely between the qualities which different actors brought to the same part, and thus did not become a partisan of Mossop against Garrick, or Barry against Garrick, or Mrs. Gregory against Mrs. Cibber. His descriptions of the performances are much more detailed and vivid than theatrical criticism at the present time affords us. They are indeed excellent prototypes of the sort of thing which Hazlitt wrote when confronted with the acting of Edmund Kean. His particular opportunity was the art of David Garrick, and in these criticisms we see Garrick going through his parts, more vividly than in any other contemporary accounts. Here are descriptions of him in

some of his most famous parts, as Sir John Brute in *The Provoked Wife*, as Abel Drugger in *The Alchemist*, as Kitely in *Every Man in His Humour*, as Benedick in *Much Ado about Nothing*, and as Ranger in *The Suspicious Husband*. It is in his description of this last-named performance that the critic suggests in a good phrase the subtlety of Garrick's acting, "More is meant than meets the ear from this Actor in general."

The series which began in October, 1758, is not certainly written by the same critic. There is a great similarity of tone and style, but one or two differences in opinion serious enough to create a doubt about the identity of the authors. As we have seen, a complaint was lodged by a correspondent against the almost universal acceptance of things by the regular *Chronicle* critic. It is true that the sympathetic spirit of the 1757 critic is found again in the critic of 1758. But the critic also seems to us to show the same discrimination in taste which we had observed in his predecessor, a discrimination based upon the same neo-classic principles as those principles stood in the middle of the eighteenth century, with an admixture of common-sense judgment. In speaking of Farquhar's *Recruiting Officer*, he is harshly opposed to the device of dressing a woman like a man, for it makes natural characterization impossible. Of Mrs. Centlivre's comedy, *The Wonder*:

A good Plot is, on all hands, allowed to be the principal Ingredient towards a good Comedy; now that of the *Wonder* is not only entertaining, but in some respects exquisitely beautiful. But when you have said thus much you have said everything; for the Language is contemptible to the last Degree; and the first Act in particular is so lame and ungraceful, that it is hardly to be borne ... The Writing of this comedy is below Censure, and the Acting of it above Praise.

*Love for Love* he calls the best comedy ever written, ancient or modern. He approves the wit and humor in Vanbrugh's *Provoked Wife* but repeats the contemporary verdict that the play lacks "grace." Farquhar's *Twin Rivals* is praised because it does not "violate morality." Yet again the critic is ready to give

high praise to *The Beggar's Opera*, while he withholds praise from all of the imitations of that opera except *The Quaker's Opera*, by Thomas Walker, which however he thought had been written by Fielding. He stands staunchly with the English audiences which he declares will relish *Measure for Measure* no matter what the Aristotelian critics say; and to show his own delight he quotes the song, "Take, oh take those lips away." Such tragedy as James Thomson's *Tancred and Sigismunda* he dismisses as "cold." In his comments upon the actors, it is true, he is inclined to more frequent approbation. But in one important point he differs from the critic of 1757. Whereas the earlier critic had praised heartily the interpretation by Garrick of the character of Sir John Brute, the later critic censures him vigorously for it. He compares with Garrick's interpretation the portrayal by James Quin. Quin, he says, had made Sir John a "brute" indeed, whereas Garrick made him an attractive person. The result is that Garrick's work is prejudicial to the morals of the age. He realizes the greatness of the art, and for that reason deplores the effects which it will produce. Certainly in this series there is no falling off in vigor of language or sincerity of judgment.

Presumably, the last articles in this series, beginning with No. 7, November 7-9, 1758, were written by "N.S.," who volunteered his services when the original writer had let his contributions lapse for a few weeks. Yet it is not easy to detect any differences in the criticisms themselves. In his first paper he censures Thomas Sheridan for bringing forward a *Coriolanus* concocted from Shakespeare and Thomson and declares, "I am for wine by itself, and water by itself; all Shakespeare or all Thomson." And in the same issue he shows himself by no means taken in by the common comparison between Nicholas Rowe's tragedies and Shakespeare's. Like his predecessors he can be outraged by the indecency of plays, a play like *The London Cuckolds*, by Ravenscroft, making him declare that the author deserved to be

hanged. He has a catholic taste for entertainments, for he can enjoy pantomime, and Italian opera, as well as comedy and tragedy. He is proud of the audiences which enjoy *The Way of the World*. Like Addison he disapproves of tragi-comedy, and says of Dryden's *Spanish Friar*:

There are a great many fine Things said in the tragick Part of this Play, and a great many good ones in the comic; but such Productions are at best a sort of equivocal Generation, and the present Piece is indeed a mere Hermaphrodite, for it partakes of two species, without being perfect in either.<sup>50</sup>

Like the earlier critic he is interested in character study, for his last three articles are an extended discussion of the character of Marplot in *The Busy Body* by Mrs. Centlivre, as it was written by the author and as it had been played from its first performance until the present time by a long line of actors ending with Garrick and Woodward.

Whether written by one man or by several these criticisms in the *London Chronicle* during 1757 and 1758 are the first important theatrical criticisms written for a regular newspaper and form a body of critical discussion of the drama that illustrates interestingly the state of dramatic criticism at this period. They show some of the signs of modification which can be attributed to the necessity of writing in haste for newspaper publication and to the influence of writing as a member of an audience to a wide public interested, but not academically, in the theatre.

These articles also created a stir in their own day.<sup>51</sup> They were reprinted frequently in other papers. The *Evening Adver-*

<sup>50</sup> When *The Spanish Friar* had been produced at Drury Lane on February 22, 1757, the *Chronicle* critic had quoted Addison on tragi-comedy and had then promised that at some future time he would discuss the subject in relation to Dryden's play. Perhaps this is that further discussion and we are still dealing with the writings of the same critic.

<sup>51</sup> In the *London Chronicle* for March 12-15, 1757, the critic takes credit for having caused the withdrawal of a comedy, *The Rover* (an alteration of Mrs. Behn's *Rover*), which he had vigorously condemned.

tiser, soon after the beginning of the *Chronicle's* department of "THE THEATRE," initiated as its leading article a series called "The Dramatick Register," and there reprinted the articles from the *Chronicle*, with occasional omissions of parts. This continued to the end of the first series in the *Chronicle*. But when the new series began in December, 1757, the *Evening Advertiser* did not resume its reprints. The *Gazetteer* and *London Daily Advertiser* also occasionally reprinted reviews from the *Chronicle*. When the series began in October, 1758, *Lloyd's Evening Post*, which appeared a day later each time than the *Chronicle*, reprinted the whole series regularly. Furthermore it did so without acknowledging its indebtedness, except in the first article on October 4-6. As we trace the development of theatrical criticism in other periodicals in these years we find many references to the *Chronicle* critic and his opinions.

Thomas Francklin, in his essay paper, the *Centinel* (No. I, January 6, 1757, to No. CXL, December 31, 1759), made the old familiar promise in a new way. He had hired, he said, the soldiers who stood guard at the proscenium

to superintend the representation with a critical eye; to make a faithful report of the excellencies and demerits of each performer: and when they perceive any actor wilfully deviate from nature, either by soaring to bombast, or sinking to grimace and buffoonery; their duty is to acquaint me immediately with the names of such delinquents, that effectual means may be made use of to recall them to that standard which they have so treacherously deserted

Yet his "sentinels" never afterwards reported on theatrical matters in any way worthy of notice. Another essayist, without promising so much, the *Rhapsodist* (No. I, January 24, 1757, to No. VIII, March 14, 1757), entered into a lively critical battle against the fulsome supporters of Garrick. In a section of the periodical called the "Weekly Record," he crowed in triumph over the prejudiced critics who had expected Barry to fail, in Richard III, to equal Garrick's performance. On February 7 he even struck at the *London Chronicle*:

While the trade, to wit, booksellers, etc. claim back their respective mangled properties from the *London Chronicle*, which is the most indigested Gallimawfry that hath ever been dished up for the public, we shall confine ourselves to remark on its *really original* writer for that part called the *Theatre*, which see in *Tuesday's* number of the 1st Instant, particularly the paragraph relating to Mr. Barry's acting Richard

After quoting and refuting parts of the *Chronicle* critic's interpretation of Richard's character and the powers necessary for an actor in the rôle, the "Rhapsodist" proceeded to an indirect charge of partiality:

The drift of the comparison between messieurs *Mossop* and *Barry* is as obvious as the motive is contemptible,

meaning, that is, that the *Chronicle* was attempting to put both out of the running in favor of Garrick. Again on February 14, he attacked the *Chronicle's* criticism of Garrick, this time in the part of Ranger in *The Suspicious Husband*. His attack is obviously mere carping for the sake of harassing Garrick and his friends On February 21, the "Rhapsodist" ventures upon vituperative description of Garrick's acting, in connection with a discussion of the merits of Barry and Garrick in Romeo:

As to the peculiar strokes and snatches of grace of this *Roscius*, nature having disclaimed them, they are not proper objects for imitation: to wit,—crouded starts, frequent stamping, hurried jerks, sudden cramps, school-boy ejaculation to jarring hoarseness, frequent eye-flapping; anxious wrigglings up of the shoulder-blade, like a thin-clad *Frenchman* in frosty weather; all which tricks degrade the Tragedy to Farce; and instead of affecting, make the judicious laugh.

On February 28, he referred his readers to a "warm and spirited account of Mrs. Gregory's *Calista*" in the *London Chronicle*, recognizing the excellent writing of the *Chronicle* critic even though it too often went towards praise of Garrick. Another enemy of Garrick was William Shirley, author of the *Herald, or Patriot-Proclaimer. By Stentor Tell-Truth, Esq.* (No. I, September 17, 1757, to No. XXX, April 6, 1758). Shirley had written plays for the stage, the most successful of which

was a tragedy, *Edward the Black Prince* (1750). Although Garrick had aided in bringing out this tragedy, Shirley had, for some reason, come to feel angered against him. In this periodical, under the guise of correspondents, he bitterly denounced Garrick, who by trick and cunning corrupts our national taste, misleads generosity, and attracts universal attachment, by elbowing all rival or superior merit from public knowledge or regard, for the sake of heaping up such immense wealth as is, every way, a mischief and dishonour to the community.

Of his fellow-journalists he asked,

Can any man read the theatrical disquisitions of garret scribblers, in the paltry compilations of Chronicles and Magazines, without detesting the ascendancy of leaders in a diversion that can only in a subordinate degree be either eligible or durable?

This outburst drew from "Severus" a letter of approval and a proposal that he himself should write frequently on theatrical matters, with the intention of surveying Garrick's merit, as actor, author, and manager. In this letter his merits as actor are discussed, and though he is admitted to be preëminent among contemporary actors, he is not allowed to be perfect and a number of flaws are found, especially in comparison with the actors of an earlier day. In No. XX, January 26, 1758, Garrick is criticized as an author and a manager. In No. XXV, March 2, Shirley takes delight in ridiculing Home's ill-fated tragedy, *Agis*, because it was an opportunity for ridiculing Garrick's treatment of authors. None of the other papers contain anything more close to literary criticism.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>52</sup> The following verses, published in the *London Chronicle*, September 26-28, 1758, clearly refer to Shirley and suggest that he carried on his warfare upon Garrick in another periodical, *The Citizen*, after the decease of *The Herald, or Patriot-Proclaimer* (here shortened to the *Patriot*):

"To MR GARRICK

On seeing him frequently and grossly abused in a Paper, called the *Citizen*.

Tho' the starv'd Patriot dropt his edgeless Pen—  
Behold him now crawl forth the *Citizen!*

Two more famous periodical essayists next require our attention. Samuel Johnson's series, *The Idler* (No. I, April 15, 1758, to No. 103, April 5, 1760), contains but one essay on the theatre: No. 25, October 7, 1758, which begins with the news of the début of two new actors and goes on to urge a larger humanness in the treatment of new actors, and also of new poets and "new actors on the stage of life." More important to our study is the work of Oliver Goldsmith in the *Bee* (No. 1, October 6, 1759, to No. 8, November 24, 1759).

Goldsmith had already written about some dramatic performances and about the state of the stage in England. In the *Monthly Review* for May, 1757, he wrote a review of John Home's tragedy, *Douglas*, which had become for the time the most talked-of literary work. He spoke first of the dearth of good plays which had led to the over-rating of Home's tragedy, and then in scornful terms of the want of knowledge and taste in most of the critics of the day. He then stated some of his principles of criticism and his own feeling for his position as critic:

To direct our taste, and conduct the poet up to perfection has ever been the true critic's province, and though it were to be wished that all who aim at excellence would endeavor to observe the rules he pre-

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Behold him Foe profest to Merit stand,  
And pour his Poison with unsparing hand,  
Chief upon thee: Thy worth so sweet a bait,  
It tempts his envy, and provokes his hate  
What tho' thy back his sinking *Edward* bore  
And brought him thro' the tempest to the shore?  
What tho' you bore for him the public curse,  
Well lin'd his belly, and well fill'd his purse.  
Yet all his malice and thy wrongs excuse,  
The *man* must eat, the *scribbler* must abuse:  
With smiles receive these favours at his hand,  
Which nature and necessity command  
And tho' thy kindness he returns with gall,  
Look on his face and you'll forgive it all "

scribes, yet a failure in this respect alone should never induce us to reject the performance.

A melancholy exact adherence to all the rules of the drama is no more the business of industry than of genius. Theatrical law-givers rather teach the ignorant where to censure than the poet how to write. If sublimity, sentiment, and passion give warmth and life and expression to the whole, we can the more easily dispense with the rules of the Stagyrite; but if languor, affectation, and the false sublime are substituted for these, an observance of all the precepts of the ancients will prove but a poor compensation.

Of *Douglas*, he then went on to say:

Suffice it, then, if we only add that this tragedy's want of moral, which should be the groundwork of every fable; the unfolding a material part of the plot in soliloquy, the preposterous distress of a married lady for a former husband, who had been dead near twenty years, the want of incidents to raise that fluctuation of hope and fear which interest us in the catastrophe, are all faults we could easily pardon, did poetic fire, elegance, or the heightenings of pathetic distress afford adequate compensation; but these are dealt to us with a sparing hand.

Lest he seem to dwell too much on imperfections, where there was really promise of things in the future, he then praised Home's ability to describe nature and to give artistic expression to the characters of a common rank in life, and then quoted some striking passages. When he was writing reviews for the *Critical Review* two years later, one of the books which came before him was Arthur Murphy's tragedy, *The Orphan of China*. In the April number of the *Critical Review*, 1759, he considered Murphy's production as one of the great number of imitations of things oriental which had swept over Europe during the century. He declared that Voltaire was successful with his *L'Orphelin de la Chine*, from which Murphy took his plot, only when he left the sorry business of fashionable Orient-mongering and wrote frankly as a European about Europeans. He then praised Murphy for having gone still further from imitation of Chinese characters and manners; he saw in the result a play, "if not truly Chinese, at least entirely poetical." He closed with some com-

ments upon the pathos which Murphy effected as compared with the pathetic powers of Shakespeare, Otway, and Rowe. And here he was led to comment as a member of the audience rather than as a reviewer at his desk:

We have been led into these reflections from observing the effect the ingenious performance before us had upon the audience the first night of its representation. The whole house seemed pleased, highly and justly pleased, but it was not with the *luxury of woe* they seemed affected—the nervous sentiment, the glowing imagery, the well-conducted scenery, seemed the sources of their pleasure; their judgment could not avoid approving the conduct of the drama, yet few of the situations were capable of getting within the soul, or exciting a single tear; in short, it was quickly seen that all the faults of the performance proceeded from vicious imitation, and all its beauties were the poet's own.

Finally he quoted a scene and compared Murphy's achievement with Voltaire's, giving Murphy the better of the argument.

About the same time Goldsmith wrote another essay on drama and the theatre which had important effects upon his own life, though it does not constitute an important document in our study here. In *An Inquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe*, published in April, 1759, he devoted one chapter to the stage. He found that the stage participated in the general decline of letters in England, and for this decline he blamed the managers of the theatres and the critics, who between them crushed out all powers of the poet who attempted to write plays. He was especially harsh upon the managers, with more or less obvious pointing at Garrick, and by this attack he paved the way for enmity with Garrick in later days when the actor might have been serviceable to him.

What he thought of the critics of drama in his day was more clearly expressed in the opening number of the *Bee*, in October of the same year. Under "Remarks on our Theatres" he began:

Our theatres are now opened, and all Grub Street is preparing its advice to the managers. We shall undoubtedly hear learned disquisitions on the structure of one actor's legs and another's eyebrows.

We shall be told much of enunciations, tones, and attitudes, and shall have our lightest pleasures commented upon by didactic dulness. We shall, it is feared, be told that Garrick is a fine actor, but, then, as a manager, so avaricious! That Palmer is a most surprising genius, and Holland likely to do well in a particular cast of character. We shall have them giving Shuter instructions to amuse us by rule, and deplored over the ruins of desolated majesty at Covent Garden. As I love to be advising too, for advice is easily given, and bears a show of wisdom and superiority, I must be permitted to offer a few observations upon our theatres and actors, without, on this trivial occasion, throwing my thoughts into the formality of method.

There followed a criticism of English actors as too stiff and formal, needing the study of the actions of people for the true delineation of character by significant gesture. He compared them with the French actors and gave some vivid examples of French comic acting and of crude English efforts. He then criticized some improprieties in stage productions: the laying of the green carpet before the death scenes, the pages who carried the trains of the heroines, and the number of inattentive supernumeraries on the stage. Lastly he made a demand for beauty in actresses and for more appropriate casting, so that, for example, the starving Jane Shore should not be played by a fat and healthy actress. Such a first article of theatrical criticism promised well for that department in this new periodical. In No. II, October 13, he began with a description of Mlle. Clairon, whom he declared the most perfect actress on the stages of Europe; all others fell short "when the soul comes to give expression to the limbs, and animates every feature." His description of her was curiously negative and thus threw a good deal of criticism upon the English actresses with whom Goldsmith was naturally comparing her. She did not—and presumably they too often did—stare at the audience upon her entrance, nor begin explosively to spout and to wave her arms simultaneously, nor alternately to stretch out and draw in her arms, nor to gesture with her elbows "pinned to her hips." He gave the advice not to destroy the illusion of the drama by taking applause at the end of

scenes, nor to study gestures before the looking-glass. In No. V, November 3, he wrote "A Word or Two on the late Farce, called *High Life Below Stairs*." He found that the single idea in the piece was not sufficiently broad to afford variety, that there was too much sameness in character, and too little incident, and that the author had sacrificed humor for "nature," or what we should call "realism." This was a characteristic remark for the future author of *She Stoops to Conquer*, who much preferred being funny to being merely "true to life." It was also characteristic of the critic who had declared that the "rules," which included the demand for "nature" above all things, were not infallible as the sole guides of dramatic composition. In No. VIII, November 24, the last number of this excellent but short-lived periodical, he wrote an essay on the opera in England. He found the opera declining in popularity in England and laid the decline to the fact that as now conducted, with trifling and cheap decorations and indifferent singers and skipping dances to please the galleries and infinitely repeated songs, it was but a "humdrum amusement." He wished that the operas of Metastasio might be played continuously to restore that form of drama to its rightful dignity again, but he ended with a cry of despair so long as the theatres were to be controlled by the commercial managers.

This series is Goldsmith's nearest approach to the work of a theatrical critic. In the *Citizen of the World* there are several essays which comment upon the theatres, the actors, and the plays of the time. These essays are more like the essays in the *Spectator* than those of the *Tatler*, and therefore are occasional essays, rather than continuous reporting of performances. Another occasional essay is that published in the *British Magazine* for June, 1769, a "Parallel between Mrs. Vincent and Miss Brent," two popular singers on the stage. And it is probable that Goldsmith wrote for the *Westminster Magazine, or the Pantheon of Taste*, as part of its "Preliminary Number," an "Essay on the Theatre, or a Comparison between Laughing and Sentimental

Comedy."<sup>53</sup> Again, as in the case Steele, we have found a man capable of fresh and vigorous criticism, and the medium of the periodical press is still so unstable that no place is found for his talents.<sup>54</sup>

The theatrical criticism in the magazines during this decade consists largely of accounts of plays like those which we found in the *Gentleman's Magazine* after 1748. Yet there were some variations and some new attempts to add critical remarks.

The *Gentleman's Magazine* published a summary of the plot of each new tragedy and comedy, and even of an occasional farce. Sometimes the account would also include remarks about the play. In the magazine for February, 1751, the account of Edward Moore's comedy *Gil Blas* ends with several paragraphs of criticism: approving the taste of the "Town" which had rejected the piece emphatically, and attempting to explain the failure on the grounds of Moore's misinterpretation of the character of his hero. The account of William Mason's tragedy, *Elfrida* (May, 1752), is prefaced by some remarks about the theory of tragedy expounded by Mason in the five letters published with the play. The critic opposes the attempt to resurrect the classical type of drama in more enlightened modern times; specifically he opposes the preference for beauties of poetry and wise aphorisms over significant incidents, for he has been taught by the Elizabethan drama to admire drama filled with "affecting" action. A paragraph is added to the account of Edward Moore's tragedy, *The Gamester*, in February, 1753, commenting favorably upon the effect of tragedy written in prose. In the April number, 1754, some detailed remarks are made on the

<sup>53</sup> See Forster, John *Life of Goldsmith*, Book IV, Chap XIII (Jefferson Edition, Vol IV, pp 74-75).

<sup>54</sup> Goldsmith's most recent editor, Professor R. S. Crane, in *New Essays by Oliver Goldsmith*, Chicago, 1927, suspects (see p 130) that Goldsmith was the author of a paper "The Theatre" in the *Lady's Magazine*, October, 1760 (Vol. II, pp. 111-13); the essay contained a "scale of the actors," graduated judgments of the actors' abilities.

language of Philip Francis's *Constantine*. The criticism in these and other paragraphs of remarks on new plays is labored literary criticism, not written as playhouse impressions. It is usually mere generalizations of judgment.

As early as 1748 there were occasionally added to the items in the "Register of Books" in the *Gentleman's Magazine* a few remarks. Published plays will in later years be reviewed in this place. The *Magazine* also published lists of the plays acted during the month at both houses. In November, 1752, we first find under these lists notes about the plays. These notes are the slightest kind of criticism. In December a paragraph is reprinted from the *Scourge*, criticizing the pantomime, *The Genii*.<sup>55</sup> In the same section, in October, 1753, are remarks from the *Gray's Inn Journal*. In the issue for October, 1754, we find a "calendar" of plays, with very slight remarks about the plays. By December only the calendar remains.

Not only new plays draw forth these longer, studied criticisms in the *Gentleman's Magazine*; occasionally a revival of an old play leads to a discussion of its merits. A revival of *Every Man in His Humour* in January, 1752, brought a quotation of some remarks by Peter Whalley from his edition of Jonson's plays which was then in the press. In April of the same year appear "Observations on the Tragedy of Oroonoko," which contain a lively indictment of the mixing of comic scenes with tragedy and of the practice of thus stringing out a play just because of the critical demand for five-act tragedies, and also praise for the pathetic powers of Southerne. The "Romeo war" in 1750—the rival playing of Romeo by Barry at Covent Garden and Garrick at Drury Lane—was an event large enough for this magazine to take account of it by reviewing the current criticisms on both sides, and adding another summing up of the merits of the players.

Much the same sort of criticism is found in the *London Magazine*.

<sup>55</sup> See above, p. 119, note 25.

*zine*, though there is less of it. "Accounts" of new plays were usually published, but the comments added to the synopses of plots were seldom more than puffs and are always without critical value. An occasional piece of criticism by a correspondent took up some aspect of the current drama. In 1759, beginning with the September issue, remarks were added to items in the "Catalogue of Books." Further developments in the direction of regular criticism will be spoken of in the next chapter.

The other magazines of the decade may be dealt with even more briefly. The *Ladies' Magazine* (1749-53) published the usual "plan" of some of the new plays. No II, Vol. II, however, for November 17 to December 1, 1750, contained "Free Remarks on *Romeo and Juliet*" by "Theatricus," which dealt with the merit of the alterations in Shakespeare's play and with the acting of it, and No. I of Volume IV, January 6, 1753, had an essay on the absurdity of pantomimes. At the end of the "plans" there were sometimes laudatory remarks. The *Lady's Curiosity, or Weekly Apollo, by Nestor Druid, Gent.* in 1752 contained a dialogue on the false sublime in tragedy, some mock rules for tragedy writing, a recipe for a modern critic, and a letter from some one who claimed to be the "Trunk-Maker" of *Spectator* fame. Now these essays, curiously enough, are late borrowings without acknowledgement from the *Universal Spectator and Weekly Journal*, 1732, and the *Touchstone*, 1728.<sup>58</sup> In the *Literary Magazine; or Universal Review* (January, 1756, to July, 1758) there was no theatrical criticism until March, 1757. In No. XI, February 15 to March 15, in a review of Samuel Foote's farce, *The Author*, are some excellent remarks on farce and comedy, and the review shows good appreciation of Foote's humor. The next number contains a complete review of *Douglas*. In January, 1758, there is a section called "Theatrical Remarks," with some remarks on a current farce. A few other numbers have letters from correspondents on theatrical matters

<sup>58</sup> See above, p 72 and p 56.

or reviews of plays. These reviews are some advance over the "plans," but they do not continue long enough to give us a body of critical writing. The *Monthly Review*, beginning in 1749, and the *Critical Review*, beginning in 1756, contain reviews of the more important plays when they are published, but the reviews are not usually written as reviews of performances but of books to be read. The *Royal Magazine, or Quarterly Bee* (October, 1750, to June, 1751) reprinted some articles from other periodicals. The *Weekly Magazine and Literary Review, by Mr. Nicholas Spencer* (No. I, April 15, 1758, to No. XVI, July 29, 1758) promised in its "Introduction" to criticize "conduct of the managers, . . . the excellencies, defects, and pretensions of particular performers, the merits of new and revived pieces, and occasionally of those which they call stock plays," but after the first review of Foote's farce, *The Upholsterer*, no other reviews appeared.

The criticism which we have studied in this period is especially noted for its attention to the problem of acting. Many of the critics were actors themselves, or had been actors, they held theories of acting and had come under the influence both of the older actors led by James Quin and of the new leader, David Garrick. The story of the struggle for supremacy between these two styles of acting is well known to students of the period. Here in numerous essays we meet contemporary discussion of the way the audiences were affected by the opposed styles. Acting had become an art worthy of careful study, not, as it was thought to be by some men in Steele's day, merely the tricks of mountebanks who disturbed a scholar's understanding and interpretation of the drama. Though this was not strictly dramatic criticism, yet it very naturally led to vital criticism of drama, through imposing the necessity of study of the plays before judgment could be made of the success with which the actors had interpreted the parts. Thus it had indubitable influence upon the growth of the study of Shakespeare's characters and perhaps also upon the

change in emphasis in the criticism of his plays, from interest in plot to interest in character.

While it is found to be still the custom of the smaller men to insist upon the so-called "rules" of drama in their criticism, in the writings of Arthur Murphy and Oliver Goldsmith we have seen a decidedly modified adherence to the pseudo-classic doctrines. It was not possible for the age to relish yet the romantic profusion of Shakespeare, yet none of the critics but knew that Shakespeare was greater than those writers of tragedy who had followed all the "rules" and had written thoroughly correct and dull plays. Since it was not seen by them to be possible to find Shakespeare's greatness in the structure of his plots, it became necessary to stress, in opposition to Aristotle's ancient theory, the primary importance of character in tragedy. In this shift of emphasis in the criticism of drama the theatrical critics were in a specially favored position. They were continually being offered varied interpretations of the characters through the art of those "best commentators" on Shakespeare, the actors. Their articles demanded of them close attention to the author's meaning in his plays in respect to his characters. Judgment of the success of aspiring actors, which was the critic's immediate aim, led quite naturally to judgment of the author's creations in character, which became in the end, with the Romantic critics, one of the first aims of criticism. It is impossible to say how much the conditions of theatrical criticism contributed to this shift in emphasis in the criticism of tragedy, but certainly some early revelations of the shift have been found in the periodical criticism which has been reviewed in this chapter.

Another element in tragedy which came to be stressed in eighteenth-century criticism would also naturally be prominent in the experience of the critic in the theatre. After he had applied his "rules" for the measurement of the value of a tragedy of Shakespeare or of some of his contemporaries, the critic who was being honest with himself would often find a residue of emo-

tional effect which was not yet accounted for. His emotions had been stirred by the exhibition of the passions of men. No matter how many faults could be found in the structure of the play—in the “fable,” the “sentiments,” the “diction,” and the “characters”—there had been created this pleasurable representation of passionate humanity in conflict. From the middle of the century we shall meet frequent demands for the powerful exhibition of passion, and critics will even give up all the “rules” if this exhibition—added to the creation of true characters—be afforded. Again, it is easy to see how this shift in emphasis in criticism would be peculiarly congenial to the critic who derived the most vivid of his impressions of the work of the dramatist from the actual theatrical representation of the plays. At any rate, we meet with criticisms of this sort in the periodicals from this time on.

The controversy over sentimental comedy did not receive much attention during this period. Few full-length comedies were being produced; the second growth of sentimental comedy was not to crop out until the following decade. The comic drama was confined to farce, comic opera, and pantomime—short after-pieces with no pretensions to literary merit nor to any of the standards of comic art, whether the comedy of manners or the sentimental comedy. This fact was deplored continually by the critics of the time. The taste for spectacle in pantomime seemed to them to be at the root of the decay of the comic drama. The old controversy, which began back in the days when John Rich first produced the antics of Harlequin on the London stage, had continued into the middle of the century unabated; but it remained a merely critical controversy, for the managers continued to make fortunes out of the pantomime and audiences chose them in preference to the serious drama, as they do the lighter forms of entertainment today. Occasionally, however, we find a critic like the writer of the *London Chronicle* articles, who had entered so fully into his profession that he recorded

his impressions of a pantomime as faithfully as those of tragedy and comedy, criticizing the entertainment according to its own pretensions, not to alien standards.

The opera, however, had more fortunately established itself in critical opinion. Whereas in an earlier period, but for such exceptional defenses like that by Addison, the opera would have been customarily linked in condemnation with the pantomime, by the present decade it met with as much praise as denunciation. Probably the translations and adaptations of the work of Metastasio had done as much as anything else to cause the change of opinion in the cultured classes. Certainly critics like the writer in the *London Chronicle* and Oliver Goldsmith were to be found according to opera a place of dignity among other established dramatic forms, and Goldsmith even attacked the managers for failing to produce operas as generously and tastefully as their importance demanded.

This chapter has described a fairly fruitful period in theatrical criticism. From this time on we shall be more and more likely to find the newspapers carrying essays about the performances, especially whenever new plays are produced. Several well-known writers have given their attention to this kind of writing. The *London Chronicle* has set a high standard of excellence which is not rivaled for some time to come. In the fitful emergence of the critical department in papers here and there we are reminded again of the jerky progress of this business or art of theatrical criticism. We are on the threshold, however, of an expansion in the size and scope of the newspapers and clearly have precedents for the establishment of the theatrical department in any progressive journal.

## CHAPTER IV

1760-1770

The years between 1760 and 1770 saw some important developments in English drama. Sentimental comedy, through the work of William Whitehead, Richard Cumberland, Mrs. Frances Sheridan, and Hugh Kelly, definitely took the ascendancy away from the older comedy of manners. Though Goldsmith and Sheridan were to threaten this conquest a few years later, the sentimentalists had established themselves securely for the rest of the century and farther. In tragedy there were no changes in type: the mixed form of tragedy which combined elements from Elizabethan tragedy, from classical theory, and from French tragedy continued to be produced. But John Home produced in this period *Douglas*, the most popular English tragedy of the last years of the century. Samuel Foote was conducting entertainments at the Haymarket Theatre which perpetuated something of the more lively spirit of comedy and farce. Under the management chiefly of David Garrick and George Colman the two great theatres were at the height of their powers in acting and were offering a varied and increasingly better repertory of old plays, in spite of the necessity of also pandering to the taste for spectacle, pantomime, comic opera, and farce. The rivalry between Garrick and Colman towards the end of the period stimulated the actors to greater efforts and brought some good effects in the quality of production as well as the inevitable bad effects when popular audiences are sought for in a competitive race.

During the period a number of capacious newspapers were running regularly: the *Public Advertiser*, *Gazetteer*, *General*

*Evening Post*, *London Chronicle*, and *Lloyd's Evening Post*. To these were added at this time two papers which were important eventually in the history of theatrical criticism, the *St. James's Chronicle* and the *Public Ledger*. All these newspapers purveyed both original copy and reprints from each other. The news of the town was thoroughly covered. Several papers carried fairly regular news reports of the theatres as well as advertisements. Critiques which amounted to more than news reports were frequently reprinted in other papers. Any new play was fairly certain of at least a published summary of its plot, and perhaps a paragraph or two of comment on its merits. Newspaper critics were becoming known in the town, often indeed notorious.

But the magazines outstripped the newspapers, both in the increase in quantity production, and in their attention to the business of theatrical criticism. Magazines had become almost innumerable. They drew to them such men as Dr. John Hawkesworth, Tobias Smollett, and Oliver Goldsmith. As material for the present study we also find a group of purely theatrical periodicals, in the tradition of Steele's *Theatre* and Aaron Hill's *Prompter*.

The *London Chronicle* after the series of 1758 did not renew its interest in the theatre until 1766. There were occasional letters to the editor about particular events and an occasional account of a new play, but no new series until September 27-30, 1766, when began "The Theatrical Register; or Weekly Rosciad, No. 1." The articles under this heading were but short notes about plays and players, and appeared frequently but at widening intervals until the middle of 1767. The only discussion of the theatre in the *Chronicle* for 1769 was an essay, on January 3, "Reflections upon Mr. Garrick as an Actor and Writer."

"The Theatrical Register; or Weekly Rosciad" was apparently not original with the *London Chronicle*. It was called popularly "The Rosciad," and doubtless took its name from Charles Churchill's famous verse satire on the players of his day,

*The Rosciad*, 1761. It is not clear who is the author of the series of articles,<sup>1</sup> nor where they first were printed. The *Chronicle* began to print them, as we have seen, with No. 1, on September 30. *Lloyd's Evening Post*, another tri-weekly newspaper, first quoted from the series in its issue for October 15-17, and thereafter fairly regularly reprinted parts of the articles. In both these papers the reprinting went on until the middle of 1767. Comparison of the versions shows that both were taken from a common source. There will be found paragraphs in the *Chronicle* which are not to be found in *Lloyd's*, and *vice versa*. In one passage from "The Rosciad" the *Chronicle* has stopped in the middle of a sentence; the *Post* finishes the sentence and gives six lines more than the *Chronicle*. *Owen's Weekly Chronicle*, only imperfect files of which could be consulted, appears also to have been reprinting these articles. On January 10, 1767, it printed "The Theatrical Register, or Weekly Rosciad," No. XV, an account of the comic opera *Cymon*. This account had appeared in *Lloyd's Evening Post*, January 5-7, but the versions are not identical. It had also appeared in the *Gazetteer* on January 5, and in the *London Chronicle*, January 3-6, and looks very much like a puff from the hands of the managers of the theatre. In the *St. James's Chronicle*, January 13-15, was published a letter signed "Anti-Flatulent," which gives some hints about the author of "The Rosciad":

Having heard so much in the Papers of the Stupidity of the Author of a certain Dramatick Critique, called the *Rosciad*, I was tempted yesterday . . . to read this famous Critick's Account of the Dramatic Romance, called *Cymon*, in the last Thursday's paper No man can be suppos'd to want Christian Patience, who could wade such a Length of Paper thro'—*The Magic Reign of listless Indolence*—*The free-born Muse borne on emancipated Wings*—or deviating to rest beneath a bowry Shade romantick, aside enchanting Streamlets, to

<sup>1</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography* attributes them to John Potter, then theatrical critic on the *Public Ledger*. See also Boaden, James. *Private Correspondence of David Garrick*, Vol. I, p. 247-48.

*gather rich golden Fruits, or pluck from verdant Stalks sweet Nature's floscular Elegancies!*

The letter refers to the critic's employer as "Mr. N——." The most important theatrical criticism at the time seems to have been appearing in the *Public Ledger*, published by J. Newbery, but the extant files of the paper are so imperfect that it has not been possible to verify such identifications as this suggests. However, the tangle does show how the papers of the day drew upon each other rather than insist upon original composition.

The *Public Ledger, or the Daily Register of Commerce and Intelligence*, published by J. Newbery and edited by Griffith Jones, began on January 12, 1760, with a statement from the proprietors to the public which said, *inter alia*,

We are unwilling to raise Expectations which we may, perhaps, find ourselves unable to satisfy; and, therefore, have made no mention of Criticism or Literature, which yet we do not professedly exclude, nor shall we reject any Political Essays, that are apparently calculated for the Public Good.

Early in its career the *Ledger* showed itself ready to discuss the drama and theatrical performances. On January 19 appeared the first number of an essay series, "The Ranger. By Sir Simeon Swift," promising to expose, among other things, "how a man may be a great actor, when his head is off; tho' that perhaps is less a miracle" than how a woman—i.e. a tragedy queen who rises to speak a comic epilogue—can dance after she is dead. "Sir Simeon" wrote but once more, on January 21, and filled his paper with a too sweetly good-natured review of Miss Brent's performance in *Comus*. His series gave way on January 23 to No. 1 of a new series, *Life*. In No. III of *Life*, January 26, the author said:

As in the prosecution of the task I have undertaken, it will be necessary in traversing all the walks of life, to point out various characters, and to select the various flowers and weeds which decorate or deface its many colour'd garden, it cannot be supposed but that I must sometimes visit the spot where its more general picture is ever to be expected, and in which, by turns, the figures which compose it,

may all be found assembled. I mean the Theatre. . . . Every new piece presented to the public there is a fresh gather'd nosegay, in which the skilful botanist expects to find amongst the general cluster, some species hitherto undescribed, or at the best but ill-class'd, and imperfectly distinguished

Consequently he had gone to the theatre, and here reviewed the two pieces by Arthur Murphy, *The Desert Island* and *The Way to Keep Him*. This review was signed with three asterisks (\* \* \*). Over the same signature frequent reviews of new plays appeared until as late as October 29, 1761. Through these reviews and some letters from a correspondent, "E. W.," and a few other reviews signed "E." or unsigned, the *Public Ledger* was able to give its readers an account of almost every new performance during two seasons at least.<sup>2</sup> The gentleman of the asterisks, however, did not create any very lively critical literature. He would give a complete summary of the plot of each play and then make some very pedantic comments upon it. Of Home's *Siege of Aquileia*, for example, he wrote:

As this detail [i.e. his summary of plot] has unavoidably extended to so great a length, I have no room for further observation, than to remark that the unities are very strictly adhered to: the language seems more sentimental than poetical. The three characters of Aemilius, Titus, and Cornelia are well painted, and were as well performed yet are the distresses rather produced by alternate suspenses in regard to a single event, the catastrophe of which the audience are sufficiently acquainted with from a couplet in the prologue, than from any variety of incidents or invention in the producing surprises. On the whole, however, it will certainly give greater pleasure in the representation than either of Mr Hume's precedent dramatic works.<sup>3</sup>

And of the revised version of Murphy's *Way to Keep Him*:

On the whole this piece is unquestionably greatly improved, both with respect to the design and execution; the characters in general strongly pointed, and their colouring closely copied from nature. . . .

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<sup>2</sup> The file in the British Museum lacks copies of the *Ledger* from the end of 1761 to July, 1765.

<sup>3</sup> *Public Ledger*, February 23, 1760.

The language is easy, and the sentimental parts naturally introduced.<sup>4</sup> After which he gave dull advice to the author how to improve specific parts of his play. The production of Murphy's next comedy, *All in the Wrong*, brought on a critical controversy into which the *Ledger* entered. In its columns letters were published praising Murphy and attacking fiercely the slanderers who were allowing personal reflections to enter into their criticisms.<sup>5</sup> It was doubtless this partisanship which caused Charles Churchill to stigmatize the newspaper in a line in *The Rosciad*: "And venal *Ledgers* puff their Murphy's name."<sup>6</sup> The author of the theatrical articles in the *Ledger* cannot be accurately identified. Andrews in his *History of British Journalism* said that "the theatrical articles were most likely written by Hugh Kelly, who, it is said, hung about the office to pick up stray jobs."<sup>7</sup> Although this would have been early in Kelly's London career, it is possible to believe it. In 1766 he was familiar enough with the London theatres to write his *Thespis; or a Critical Examination into the Merits of all the principal Performers belonging to Drury Lane Theatre*. The next year he was appointed editor of the *Public Ledger*.<sup>8</sup> After that year there is plenty of evidence that Kelly wrote the theatrical criticism. During the earlier years the "Ledger-Critick" was, however, a well-known figure.<sup>9</sup> But apparently he carried on his trade in none too savory fashion. In a letter to the Printer of the *St. James's Chronicle*, printed in that journal for November 10-12, 1763, "Philo-Drama" complained of the illiberal criticism in some newspapers:

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, January 12, 1761. See also January 26, 1760.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, June 17, 18, 20, 21, and 29, 1761.

<sup>6</sup> Churchill, Charles *The Rosciad*, 1761 (R W Lowe's edition, 1891, p. 30).

<sup>7</sup> Andrews, A *History of British Journalism*, 1859, Vol I, p. 195.

<sup>8</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, "Hugh Kelly"

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, article "John Potter," says that John Potter wrote theatrical criticism on the *Public Ledger* at this date.

I have been led into this Train of Thought from observing the low Malice, and illiberal Scandal vented almost daily in the *Public Ledger*. The Author of those Letters and Paragraphs, whoever he be, might as well suppose that he has a Right to pelt the Performers every Evening with Apples and Oranges, as to throw such Dirt at them every Day from the Press.

A journal important for our study began in March, 1761, with the first number of the *St. James's Chronicle*, a thrice-a-week newspaper which was to have a long life into the nineteenth century. Shares in the management of this paper were held by both David Garrick and George Colman. The biographer of Colman says that these men, with Bonnell Thornton,

. . . by their joint industry drew the productions of the wits of the day to that paper; which, as a depository of literary intelligence, literary contests, and anecdotes, and articles of wit and humour, soon eclipsed all its rivals<sup>10</sup>

In the early days of this newspaper there were published no theatrical criticisms except the familiar summaries of plots of new plays and occasional letters from correspondents about such things as the use of the Coronation Procession as an after-piece. There is some suspicion that the accounts were puffs of the productions of one of the proprietors, Garrick. With the opening of the season of 1762 the paper published regular notes about the performances. These were mere notes, like the following facetious bit:

On Wednesday Mr. Garrick appeared in the Character of Hamlet. Mr. Bransby appeared and disappeared in the Character of the Ghost.

Yet the notes were not puffs, and the first signs of independence from the control of the proprietors showed themselves. When Garrick brought out a pantomime to compete with Covent Garden where Rich had developed this kind of entertainment to elegant heights, the *St. James's* critic attacked pantomime as a species of drama and Garrick for getting up this one. It was

<sup>10</sup> Peake, R. B. *Memoirs of the Colman Family*, Vol I, pp 66-67.

declared a theft from *Macbeth*—it had been called *The Witches, or Harlequin Cherokee*—and consisted of “Inconsistencies, made up of Noise and dumb Shew, Dance and Song, Giants and Lilliputians, Witches, Monsters, Wooden Legs, Broomsticks, Peacocks and Canterbury Waggons.” On December 14 the revival of Fletcher’s *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife* led to remarks on the alterations of Elizabethan plays, of which the critic advised that more be produced:

Our Little-great-Manager, though too often guilty of exhibiting Nonsense and Pantomime, seems however to entertain much Affection for the nobler Parts of the Drama, and has (it is said) in his Possession, the finest Collection of old Plays in the Kingdom. Let him therefore polish some of these inestimable Jewels and expose them to publick Admiration!

A declaration of independence was published on January 27, 1763:

It having been asserted in a Printed Paper, distributed on this Occasion,<sup>11</sup> that all Communication with the Public by Means of the News Papers, was cut off, through the Influence of *one* of the Managers, we think ourselves bound, in Justice both to the Managers and ourselves, to declare that we have never been influenced by any Theatrical Manager whatever to insert or omit any Remarks relative to the Theatre.

As this declaration was challenged in the *Gazetteer* for February 4, the *St. James’s Chronicle*, February 3-5, felt it advisable to repeat its former assertion

of being totally uninfluenced; and appeal to the Judgment of our Readers, whether the Letters and Paragraphs relative to the Theatres, inserted in this Paper, are not the best Evidence of our Impartiality. It is true that the letters and paragraphs appear to be written both in favor of and opposing the work of Garrick and his company. Yet the attack upon him and the Printer of the *St. James’s Chronicle* was effectively supported by the *Gazetteer* correspondent by a challenge to Garrick to deny that he had written to this writer a request for a critical essay which he was sure

<sup>11</sup> That is, the occasion of a riot at Drury Lane over *The Devil to Pay*.

he could get published in the *St. James's Chronicle* through the interest of a friend of his. Some of the letters from this correspondent "H. H." are preserved in the Garrick Correspondence.<sup>12</sup> Garrick's connivance here seems an innocent enough desire to get public support for his side of a controversy. During the spring of 1763 the *St. James's Chronicle* prints many letters about the "Fitzgig" riots, taking the side of the managers, both John Beard of Covent Garden and Garrick.

When the new season opened in September, 1763, the *St. James's* again took up its plan of printing short notes about the performances. It did not wait for new plays, but reported on the revivals of old plays, upon new actors, and upon old matters about which something might need to be said. Yet of these notes there are but a few during the whole season. The best writing in them is represented by the discussion of Nathaniel Lee's *Rival Queens* as produced at Drury Lane and reviewed in the *St. James's Chronicle* for March 20-22, 1764:

Tuesday last was acted at this Theatre, for the first Time these twenty Years, the *Rival Queens*, containing the character of a mad Heroe drawn by a mad Poet There is not in any part of the Re-hearsal, in Chrononhotonthologos, or Tom Thumb, more ridiculous Fustian and Extravagant Rant than in this Tragedy, written at that Period, when Dryden and Lee, and some Men of Quality of the Age, produced those Dramatick Monsters, called Heroick Plays, and Tragedies in Rhime It is but Justice however to speak in the highest Terms of Commendation of the Performance of Mr Powell in the Part of Alexander, only lamenting that such extraordinary Powers of Acting should be displayed to embellish Nonsense and wasted on Bombast. It requires no small Degree of Management in this Char-

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<sup>12</sup> See *Private Correspondence of David Garrick*, edited by James Boaden, 1831-32, Vol I, p 137—a letter from "H H.," January 29, 1762; and the original of a letter from "H.H.," dated January 22, in the Forster MSS. in Kensington Museum—this last letter is endorsed on the back by Garrick himself. "Letters from H H. suppos'd to be written by Burke or Fitzpatrick and sent to me, with my answers" Fitzpatrick was the notorious "Fitzgig," leader of the "Fitzgiggo" riots in both theatres during this period.

acter not to become ridiculous by tearing a Passion to Rage. It is all written, as Bottom stiles it, *in the Tyrant's Vein, in Ercles' Vein*, and fitter for the Town-Cryer than an ingenuous Performer: Yet the Excellence of the Actor extorted our Approbation His Lamentations over Clytus moved all our Pity; and his Phrenzy excited inexpressible Terror. The wild Laughs of Madness were Touches of Acting infinitely beyond our most sanguine Expectations. Mr Love, whom we have often seen with Pleasure in Falstaff, the Spanish Friar, Boniface, etc did great Justice to the Character of Clytus; and as his Voice is rather allied to Comedy, and but little appropriated to Tragick Declamation, we could wish that the Managers would never oblige him to travel in the Road of Blank Verse except in such plain Accoutrements as those of honest Clytus The Decoration of the Play was extremely grand and elegant, and the Triumphal Entry into Babylon conducted with great Propriety and Magnificence

During the last years of the decade *St. James's Chronicle* seems to have been little more than an organ for puffing the performances of both houses, and even of Foote's productions at the Haymarket. There is no serious criticism of the drama during a period when Garrick and Colman, in collaboration and then in rivalry, were trying to foster original plays and when Garrick and Barry and many other famous actors and actresses were in their prime. After Garrick and Colman quarrelled, and Colman became the controller of the productions at Covent Garden, this paper contrived to remain friendly to both. Even during a contest such as that between Drury Lane with its production of Kelly's *False Delicacy* and Covent Garden with its production of Goldsmith's *Good-Natured Man*, the *St. James's* very nicely rode the fence:

If the Drury Lane Comedy is more refined, correct, and sentimental, the Covent Garden performance is more bold, more comick, and more characteristick; and if the former from the chaste Accuracy and duly-tempered Spirit of the Author, has less need of Pardon, the latter from having hazarded more, has more Title to Mercy and Forgiveness The Merit of both is great, and we are happy that the Beauties of each Piece are of a different Complection from that of the other; for in an Age of good *Writers* each several Author will

have a Manner peculiar to himself; but when contemporary Poets all fall into the same Vein, such a Similarity of Stile denotes a Barrenness of Invention.<sup>13</sup>

The only paper carrying authentic advertisements of both theatres was the *Public Advertiser*. The managers of the theatres announced repeatedly for months during 1763 that the bills were inserted by their direction only in this newspaper.<sup>14</sup> The biographer of the Colman family called the paper "Garrick's organ for his theatrical announcements" and laughed at the use of the "puff preliminary" in its columns.<sup>15</sup> When the actor William O'Brien exiled himself in the wilds of the Ohio valley, he wrote home for the *Public Advertisers* in order that he might see "the progress of Politics and Plays at one view."<sup>16</sup> Besides the advertisements the columns of the *Advertiser* contain occasional letters from theatrically inclined correspondents, many of whom speak of the paper as a "theatrical paper." Yet the theatrical criticism in this newspaper is very scanty and unimportant. The paper had begun in 1726 as the *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, and finally in 1752 had become the *Public Advertiser*. Yet in all this long history it comes into our study only in the decade now under review and then only slightly. From 1764 to 1766 we find in it some letters and an occasional summary of the plot of a new play and one or two short paragraphs of "Theatrical Intelligence." Once in a while it reprints a theatrical article from the *St. James's Chronicle*. In February, 1767, there are more articles than have ever appeared before, but they are of the same miscellaneous sort rather than regular critiques. And then the paper is silent about the theatres for the rest of the year. Not until late in the next decade will the *Public Adver-*

<sup>13</sup> *St. James's Chronicle*, January 30-February 2.

<sup>14</sup> See *Public Advertiser*, March 14, 1763, and subsequent issues, particularly in May.

<sup>15</sup> Peake, R. B. *Memoirs of the Colman Family*, 1841, Vol. I, p. 61.

<sup>16</sup> Forster, John. *Life of Goldsmith*, Book III, Chap. IX (Jefferson Press Edition, Vol. II, p. 146, footnote).

tiser, in spite of its value for historians of the drama itself, have any importance in our study.

The liveliest correspondence of the day is to be read in the *Gazetteer and London Daily Advertiser*. These letters frequently discuss the disputes between the proprietors of the theatres, but often also give criticisms of plays and players. The paper seems to be willing to print letters on both sides of the questions. For example on October 29, 1763, a letter from "Impartialis Ranger" berated Ross for his performance of the part of Lord Townley in *The Provoked Husband* and the managers for bringing him forward in the part. On November 3 a reply by "Honestus" told "Ranger" that he was a coward for so attacking actors and depriving them of bread and challenged "Ranger" to a fight. In the issues of January 24 and February 3, 1764, there is an interchange of opinion on the merits of Powell in *Henry IV*. The printer of the newspaper in a note, January 13, 1764, claimed that his correspondents were *bona fide* correspondents and all unknown to him. A certain "Theatricus" wrote a number of letters to the *Gazetteer* during that season. At the beginning of the season of 1764-65 he wrote a long letter (October 27) expressing his surprise that there had been of late so little discussion of drama in the newspapers, in spite of the fact that three times as many people would read theatrical articles as would read those on politics:

As this is the case, Sir, I conceive that nothing could recommend your paper more effectually to the universal esteem of the public, who have long given it a just and deserved preference to every other, than seasonable and sensible dissertations on the drama; which while they pointed out the beauties and faults of our old and new pieces, would help to amend the morals which they formed and correct the taste of the public.

He then discussed at length the comedy of the early seventeenth century and of the Restoration period. Once more during the season (January 9, 1765) he wrote to object to some unfair newspaper criticisms on the two performances of *King Lear* and

give his own opinion, but that was all. And for the rest of the decade this prominent daily newspaper gave very little space to letters or "theatrical intelligence" or to anything more than summaries of the plots of new plays.

After its reprinting of the *London Chronicle* series, "The Theatre," in 1757 and 1758, the *Lloyd's Evening Post* published almost no letters or articles on the theatre until it published during 1763 and 1764 a few "accounts" of new plays. Then, as we have seen, it printed extracts from "The Theatrical Register, or Weekly Rosciad," in 1766 and 1767. But in the autumn of 1767 the extracts from the "Rosciad" ceased and we find instead the mere summaries of a few new farces. Nothing but these summaries is to be found until the winter season of 1769 when short notes of news about the productions are added to the summaries. At least one long and well-written review appeared—the review of Dryden's *Amphitryon*, November 24-27, 1769.

Four issues of the *London Spy and Read's Weekly Journal* in 1761 contain articles more worthy the name of criticism than the rest of the papers can show. One contains a discussion of Italian pantomime and criticism of *The Wishes*;<sup>17</sup> another, a letter from "Hercules Vinegar" on Garrick as an actor, author, and manager;<sup>18</sup> another contains a discussion of acting, with references to some works of Rousseau and Goldoni;<sup>19</sup> and the fourth contains a letter on the revival of *Cymbeline*, disapproving of all additions to Shakespeare's plays which have been made except the new ending of *Romeo and Juliet*.<sup>20</sup>

In a few other newspapers there are occasional "accounts" of new plays, some gossip of happenings in the theatre, and puffs of coming plays. There are also letters here and there from correspondents discussing performances. But the decade is distinctly

<sup>17</sup> *London Spy and Read's Weekly Journal*, July 25-August 1, 1761

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, September 12-19, 1761

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, October 24-31, 1761.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, December 12, 1761.

disappointing in its failure to offer in the newspapers anything like so thoroughgoing a series of articles as that in the *London Chronicle* of the preceding ten years. The *Public Ledger*, whose files are now badly preserved, seems to have been the only paper which consistently carried serious critical essays. The others yield only a mass of scattered reviews, letters from correspondents, short news notes, and obvious puffs. The study of the magazines will be more profitable.

A study of the *Gentleman's Magazine* for these years brings us to something more than mere "accounts" of new plays. In 1760 a new performance, like that of Arthur Murphy's *The Desert Island* or his *The Way to Keep Him*, was summarized and briefly commented upon. But under the section devoted to reviews of new books we soon begin to find criticisms of plays, in which the critic takes the position, not entirely of a reviewer at his desk, but of a spectator at the play as produced in the theatre. In 1765 this section of the magazine took on larger proportions. The reviews of new books became more than mere notes or summaries. In 1767 we come upon the work of an author whom we can identify and whose articles on plays, continuing at least into 1773, form a fairly interesting body of criticism.

Dr. John Hawkesworth (1715?-73) had succeeded Dr. Samuel Johnson as the compiler of the parliamentary debates for the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1744. When Owen Ruffhead left the work of reviewing new publications in that magazine, about 1762, Dr. Hawkesworth succeeded him. In April, 1765, the section devoted to reviews of new books began to be much more important than ever before. One biographer of Hawkesworth says that it is doubtful whether he began his work as reviewer in earnest until 1765.<sup>21</sup> After this date we may be fairly sure that the reviews are from his hand. In April, 1767, we for the first

<sup>21</sup> Chalmers, Alexander *British Essayists* (Boston, 1856), Vol. XIX, Biographical Preface to *The Adventurer*, p. 19.

time find some reviews signed "X." This signature is used for many reviews, but not all, from that time until March, 1773. As it is known that Dr. Hawkesworth died in November, 1773, after a long illness, we may safely surmise that this was his signature and we may consider the essays so signed as his contribution to theatrical criticism.<sup>22</sup>

The first review of an acted play which shows unmistakably the marks of a critique composed with an eye to the performance was a long essay on *Cymon*, a dramatic romance produced at Drury Lane Theatre, January 2, 1767, and attributed to David Garrick himself. The review begins:

An adequate idea of the merit of this piece, as a theatrical entertainment, cannot be formed in the closet, as it depends in great measure upon the music, scenes and machinery.

After a full account of the events of the story, the critic complains that the author has not made the introduction of his machinery connected more probably with the events of his plot. And then he discusses very sensibly the difference between the art which draws from life and which can therefore be tested by that standard, and, on the other hand, the art which tries to "paint from Fancy." This review is not signed "X.," but bears the marks of the other work of Hawkesworth. The same may be said of the review of *The English Merchant* in March, 1767. In February, 1768, Hawkesworth published a long and interesting review of Kelly's *False Delicacy* and Goldsmith's *Good-Natured Man*. The other most important subjects of his essays are John Home's tragedy, *The Fatal Discovery*; Richard Cumberland's early plays, *The Brothers*, *The West Indian*, and *The Fashionable Lover*; and Arthur Murphy's tragedy, *The Grecian Daughter*.

This group of essays by Dr. Hawkesworth is worth studying

<sup>22</sup> William Kenrick in the *Critical Memoirs of the Times*, 1769, refers to "the very learned Dr. H —— in the Gentleman's Magazine," and again to "the Gentleman's Critick Dr. H——."

as a specimen of the critical judgment and taste of the time. Although he was reviewing the published versions of the plays, he nevertheless thought of them as performances in the theatre. He recognized the fact that a play may be dull reading in the closet and yet be lively and interesting on the stage. He could give credit to a play like Cumberland's *The Brothers* for entertaining an audience though it could not entertain a reader. In his criticism of Mrs. Lennox's comedy, *The Sister*, he suggested that Mrs. Lennox needed more acquaintance with the stage in order to learn how to lighten her scenes and make them palatable. He disliked too much narrative in a play. He criticized always from the angle of the spectator, asking, "What do I feel?" rather than, "Has the author obeyed the 'rules'?" He knew that there is something indefinable that makes the difference between a play that lives and one that does not. Although he could not find the particular flaw in Joseph Cradock's tragedy, *Zobeide*, he was compelled to say:

The characters are by no means ill sustained, and the situation in the last act cannot be exceeded, yet, by some occult defect like that which prevents a musical instrument from receiving the last excellence from the utmost diligence and skill, it does not forcibly excite pity, either upon the stage or in the closet.

This remark suggests another characteristic of this critic: he was something of a sentimentalist. Like so many critics of his time he put great emphasis upon the starting of tears in the audience as a standard of excellence in a tragedy. Murphy's *Grecian Daughter*, for example, he praised as "unequalled for the pathetic." And of certain admittedly overstrained scenes in the tragedy of *Alonzo*, by John Home, he said:

The heart, however, which does not so forcibly feel these scenes in the representation, as to forget every violation of the laws of Criticism in producing them, must be at once unworthy and incapable of that divine pleasure which the tears of Virtue only can bestow.

Yet he was not of the order of sentimentalists who could accept easily the conception of the good-hearted rake; he was too stern

a moralist for that. Such characters as Ranger in *The Suspicious Husband* and Belcour in Cumberland's *West Indian* he feared were so presented as to lead to an undermining of morality. His interest in the moral influence of the drama was shown also in the following remarks upon *The Hypocrite*, Isaac Bickerstaff's adaptation of Molière's *Tartuffe*, through the medium of Cibber's *Non-Juror*:

This play might easily have been managed so as to expose the danger and folly of erroneous tenets to good men; of believing that reason has nothing to do with religion, nor morality with the salvation of the soul. If the mischiefs that would naturally follow, from acting conscientiously [sic] upon these principles, had been humourously exposed, instead of those that arise from implicit confidence in the seeming sanctity of another, this piece might have levelled ridicule at its proper object with success. To represent devotion as hypocrisy is perhaps rather likely to countenance irreligion than restrain enthusiasm; but to show the sincere devotee counterworking the great purposes of life, in consequence of erroneous principles, would certainly be doing service to practical truth and rational religion. The character which in this play is the dupe of Cantwell, becomes so, not by any particular religious tenets, but by a zealous and laudable concern about religion in general; he is exposed to mischief, not in consequence of false principles of action in himself, but of that hypocrisy in another which might be practised equally by the Papist and Fanatic, the Faquire and the Bramin.

Hawkesworth had a taste for spirited character-drawing and some of his enjoyment broke forth occasionally in his short sketches of some of the characters, as for example of Captain Ironsides and Sir Benjamin Dove in Cumberland's *The Brothers*:

Belfield's uncle, Capt Ironsides, is a rough, honest, generous old tar, who loves the smoke of tobacco and gunpowder, who distinguishes what is right by feelings that approve it, and acquires dignity and importance in drunkenness and dirt, by the nobleness of sentiment which he does not know to be noble, and acts of benevolence and liberality which he performs by the happy necessity of his nature, just as he eats when he is hungry, or drinks when he is dry. . . .

Sir Benjamin Dove, the father of Sophia, is a henpecked fribble, whom it is impossible to bring into conversation with Ironsides, without great mirth.

After this series of criticisms by Dr. Hawkesworth plays were reviewed less and less frequently among the books reviewed in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The history of theatrical criticism in the eighteenth century need not consider the scattered articles to be found there henceforth.

From its inception the *London Magazine* had followed more or less closely the model of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Like its better known prototype it was slow to undertake the criticism of theatrical performances. Late in the decade of 1750 to 1760 we have seen that a few "accounts" of new plays appeared, with here and there a critical paragraph. In 1759 remarks about plays began to appear appended to the notice of publications under the caption, "Catalogue of Books." These remarks continued with some regularity and contained some slight criticism of the literary value of current plays whenever those plays had been successful enough to deserve printing. At least there is a summary of the "moral" of the piece and a statement as to how closely the play adhered to the "rules." During the years 1760 to 1764 comments of this sort are offered upon such plays as Colman's *Polly Honeycombe*; Arthur Murphy's *The Way to Keep Him*; John Home's *The Siege of Aquileia*; Bentley's pantomime, *The Wishes, or Harlequin's Mouth Open'd*; and Delap's *Hecuba*. Occasionally a more spirited paragraph of comment is called forth, as in February, 1763, on *The Discovery* by Mrs. Sheridan and in January, 1764, on Murphy's *No One's Enemy but His Own*. An example of the kind of comment may be seen in the following paragraph about Murphy's comedy, *What We Must All Come To*, January, 1764:

As to this second piece, by Mr. Murphy, the very title, *What we must all come to*, is a kind of libel on the married state, insinuating that the eternal squabbles, and violent altercations of married persons, about the merest trifles, are, in all cases, and with all couples,

as certain death and quarter-day. The characters of Sir William Racket and his lady are, we think, plainly borrowed from the Flutters in the *Discovery*. but the copies are infinitely inferior to their originals Upon the whole, this farce seems to be a crude and hasty performance, but we cannot but commend the sensibility, as well as prudence of the author, for having immediately withdrawn a piece which did so little honour to his genius and reputation

The authors of the present age seem to have revived the old affectionate of quaint titles to their pieces, such as, "All in the Wrong, The Deuce is in Him, No One's Enemy but His Own, What we must all come to, &c" We must confess, that we cannot discover the wit and humour of all this.

Such paragraphs are very infrequent. Usually there is nothing but the story of the new play. In 1766 some critical paragraphs from the *St James's Chronicle* are borrowed. An idea of the mechanical process which was often employed by critics during the whole century may be gained from the following attempt to review Dr. Francklin's tragedy, *The Earl of Warwick*, in the December (1766) issue of the *London Magazine*. After giving the full synopsis of the incidents, the critic proceeds:

#### CONDUCT

Though in the foregoing story there is manifest deviation from history, still this deviation is not to be attributed to the author as a fault: all that a dramatic author has to do is to give an interesting story, and to support it with an appearance of probability. This the present writer has done; and it is but justice to acknowledge that the conduct of his piece indicates a strong acquaintance with the rules of the drama and the business of the theatre.

#### CHARACTERS

Finely imagined and supported in a very masterly manner.

#### SENTIMENTS

Many new and elevated; all just; and none either trite or puerile.

#### DICTION

Chaste, nervous, and characteristic

## REPRESENTATION

Admirable, with the exception only of two characters Mr. Powell in Edward had great merit; Mr. Holland in Warwick deserves the highest approbation, but the pen must have uncommon powers of expression indeed, which can do sufficient justice to the merit of that exquisite actress Mrs. Yates.

In the Preface to the volume of 1767 the editors first mention as a part of their program theatrical criticism:

We are proud of this annual opportunity of returning our thanks to the public, and to our obliging, learned, and ingenious correspondents, for the continuance of those favours which insure the London Magazine its wonted success: and to gratify them further have prevailed upon our Theatrical Correspondent to continue his HISTORY and remarks, and upon a learned critick to give an account of NEW PUBLICATIONS in the ensuing year

Hence in the January issue we find some spirited banter of the dramatic romance, *Cymon*, from the "Theatrical Connoisseur." But there is no change in this aspect of the magazine's work until June, 1767, when the editors make a still more elaborate promise and really inaugurate a serious and continuous department for the criticism of the plays. The first essay in the magazine for June is placed under a heading, "The British Theatre," and begins as follows:

As theatrical subjects engage a principal part of the public conversation in this country, and as the theatre under proper regulations is certainly capable of giving very great assistance to the cause of good sense and morality; the authors of the *London Magazine*, to render themselves more worthy of the encouragement with which they have been so long distinguished by their numerous purchasers, intend to devote a particular portion of their work for the future to the business of the stage, and purpose to embellish their dramatic examinations from time to time with masterly prints of the principal performers in some of their most celebrated characters. . . . In the first place, they purpose to give a summary view of the British stage, from its first institution to the present time; . . . In the second place, the authors design to examine the merit of the most celebrated poets who have written for the stage, that the reader, by having a fair critique constantly before him, may be enabled to form his taste,

and know how to distinguish the flights of genius from the ravings of bombast, and the genuine face of nature from the flaring daubs of affectation. This part of their work they flatter themselves will be highly useful, as a variety of pieces are now universally admired, which want but a moment's consideration to be universally condemned, and are frequently exhibited in our theatres, out of a ridiculous reverence for the taste of our fathers, though their tendency to prejudice the cause of virtue renders them justly detestable to ourselves.

And in the last place the authors purpose to make a monthly examination into the merits of the principal performers at the several theatres; and to give such occasional memoirs of both poets and actors, as they think either necessary to illustrate their observations or likely to please the curiosity of their readers. . . .

After this scarcely veiled threat at the comedy of the Restoration period—a threat which is duly carried out in the few years to come—the “theatrical correspondent” goes on to give an account of the rise and establishment of theatrical entertainments in the kingdom, and then remarks upon the plays of Samuel Foote and upon Foote’s actors and actresses. The “British Theatre” for July gives a long and sensible criticism of the acting of Barry and of Mrs. Dancer, and a paragraph on mock tragedy. After having to be content in August with a mere “account” of a play and in September with nothing at all about the theatre, the publishers of the magazine append a pathetic note at the end of the September issue, “We desire to hear from our Theatrical Correspondent.” But for the rest of the year the “British Theatre,” like so many promised series, is wanting. In January, 1768, however, the long critiques begin again and continue with fair regularity half way through the next decade. In “The British Theatre” of the *London Magazine* during these years may be found reviews by a serious critic of important new plays, like Hugh Kelly’s *False Delicacy*; Goldsmith’s *Good-Natured Man*; Richard Cumberland’s *The Brothers* and the *West Indian*; and of many less popular plays. The critic is an earnest moralist, ready to banish all the Restoration comedy. He writes long ar-

ticles on the need for more decency in plays, and to support his appeal goes through the repertory of the theatres pointing out lines in the tragedies which are suggestive and offensive. He demands from comedy that it instruct through the means of entertainment, and supports the sentimental comedy of the day. Such a play as *The Hypocrite* by Isaac Bickerstaff brings from him pedantic criticism, with reference to the sources, Molière's *Tartuffe* and Colley Cibber's *Non-Juror*. He criticizes with reference to the "rules" of the drama, for he talks of "fable," "manners," "sentiments," and "diction." Only once in a while does it appear that his experience in the theatre has weakened his sense of the all-inclusiveness of the "rules"; as for example when he will not invoke those "rules" to criticize Foote's farce, *Dr. Last in his Chariot*, because he recognizes that the piece was made merely for "amusement."<sup>23</sup> He observes that occasionally an excellent performance will save from complete damnation a bad play like *The Brothers of Cumberland*. And he once writes an essay on "A General Defect in the Catastrophe of English Tragedies," in which he complains of the failure of the people on the stage to show any signs of desire to aid the wounded who lie before them in the last moments of tragedies.<sup>24</sup> Comments on current plays are coupled with essays on other general aspects of drama and theatrical performances, with a series of essays on the profession of a player (which contain some very sensible reflections upon the art of acting),<sup>25</sup> with reprints from other periodicals (e.g. *St. James's Chronicle*) and from such publications as Francis Gentleman's *Dramatic Censor*. The critic sums up his ideas about the drama in an "Essay on Dramatic Compo-

<sup>23</sup> *London Magazine*, June, 1769.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, December, 1769.

<sup>25</sup> These three essays have been reprinted as by James Boswell. James Boswell. *On the Profession of a Player. Three Essays first reprinted from The London Magazine for August, September, and October, 1770* London: E. Mathews and Marrot, 1929.

sition," in May, 1771, in which he declares for "pleasing instruction" as the aim of all dramatic writing, condemns the slavish imitation of the Ancients (for he perceives well enough that Greek plays would not please on the British stage), again declares that the Restoration comedy is reprehensible for its "profuse wit" and the Restoration tragic authors, Otway and Lee, reprehensible for their "improbability," and asks for improvement in English drama. In a later essay he lays most of the blame for the low state of drama to the public and to the managers, Garrick and Colman, especially to the managers. Thus we find a considerable body of critical writing in the *London Magazine* after 1767. We shall carry on the study of it when we come to the next decade.

A survey of the other magazines of the decade yields some interesting criticism. The "accounts" of new plays were almost sure to be reprinted many times in the periodicals. Sometimes a magazine set an independent critic to work to add comments to the bare recital of the incidents of the plots of the plays, and occasionally essays were written about the new performers and about the old performers in their familiar parts or in new parts undertaken. The purely philological periodicals and those which were primarily political paid, however, almost no attention to the affairs of the theatre.

The *Grand Magazine of Universal Intelligence* published in February, 1760, "A View of the New Theatrical Pieces of the Present Season"; each new play was reviewed at some length. The magazine in May of the same year published a comparison between the acting abilities of Barry and Mossop. The *Imperial Magazine; or Complete Monthly Intelligencer* published during 1760 and 1761 the usual "accounts" and rather commonplace reviews of new plays. In 1760 and 1761 the *Lady's Magazine, or Polite Companion for the Fair Sex* admitted some excellent essays about current performances. During one of these years at least, Oliver Goldsmith was editing the magazine and may have

written some of the theatrical articles.<sup>28</sup> An essay in the magazine for September, 1760, discussed the changes in acting which Garrick had introduced and went on to describe in detail the acting of Thomas Sheridan, which was a still surviving example of the older kind of acting. When Garrick and Sheridan played Rowe's *Fair Penitent* together, in November of the same year, a discussion was published comparing them in this particular performance: of Garrick it was said that he was able, in his acting of Lothario, to give to the fair Calista the appearance of genuine passion and at the same time persuade the audience that he was dissimulating; of Sheridan's acting the following paragraph gives some vivid details:

Against him are a person by no means agreeable, a stiffness in his manner of walking. his action, 'tis true, is often loose, bold, and expressive, but sometimes affected, particularly his manner of almost always holding one hand across his belly, and frequently spitting. His face if considered as a mere picture is but indifferent, and his voice uneven, sometimes piercingly shrill, at others rough and croaking With all these defects would not we pronounce him unfit for the stage! With all these defects Mr Sheridan is an excellent actor None can express passion with greater strength or justice than he The instant he attempts to strike the audience, he is sure of succeeding His face assumes the passion strongly....

The season of 1760-61 this critic found a slack season for plays; but as soon as George Colman's comedy *The Jealous Wife* was produced the magazine published a review which praised the play and the audience for approving the play. After that, however, the criticism of the theatres falls off, and during the next two years, until the end of 1763, there are no more interesting articles. The *Royal Magazine, or Gentleman's Monthly Companion* published from 1760 to 1763 the "accounts" which approached very close to mere puffs.

*The Royal Female Magazine; or Ladies' General Repository*

<sup>28</sup> Forster, John. *Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith*, Book III, Chap IV.

*of Pleasure and Improvement, conducted by Charles Honeycombe, Esq.*, 1760, affords us one or two statements of critical principle which are significant. The magazine had articles about plays during the spring of 1760, perhaps, as in July, under the heading of "New Books." The editor was Robert Lloyd, the author of a poem called *The Actor*, which had dealt with the principles of acting and with the styles of various actors of the day. The reviews so impressed a correspondent of the magazine, "Dramaticus," that he wrote in September to offer to write a regular article called "The Critic." Lloyd replied that he would be glad to receive the essays but warned "Dramaticus" that he should stick to plays and not meddle with criticism of actors. In October "The Critic, No. I" appeared, with a statement of the critic's point of view: in giving his thoughts on the entertainments of the theatre he would follow "reason and nature, not authority, or rule," and would form his opinion "on the *feeling* of my heart, rather than the *judgment* of my head, if they should at any time happen to clash." Though such a statement suggests the sentimentalism of the era, it is at least a sign of freedom from the restraint which made so much theatrical criticism mechanical. He disagreed with Lloyd about the propriety of discussing acting; he said he would not discuss particular performers except in illustration of the general principles of acting—for which he was indebted to the poem, *The Actor!* The three numbers of "The Critic" discuss acting in general, Garrick in particular, and mechanical parts of stage performances.

Hugh Kelly's *Court Magazine; or Royal Chronicle* proposed from the very start to make theatrical criticism a regular part of each number. In No. I, September, 1761, a correspondent congratulated the editor upon that aspect of the proposals and said that such a "theatrical paper" would "be of infinite use; for at the same time it corrects the taste, it must improve the under-

standing." In that issue also appeared No. I, of "The Green Room," in which the critic declared that his purpose would be rather to praise the good than to carp at the trivial faults in the actors. "The Green Room" continued through 1763, but sank from a series of comments upon the plays and players to a mere diary or calendar of the plays produced during the month. During the earlier period, however, the critic—probably Hugh Kelly himself—showed his impartiality by daring to say both disapproving and approving things about Garrick's acting: he found him incomparable in some parts of *Lear*, but mistaken in his revival of *Cymbeline*. He also complained of the scarcity of good new plays. He condemned the comedy of the Restoration period because of its immorality, and welcomed Whitehead's *School for Lovers* as an excellently moral piece, though, to be sure, the "execution of the plan" was not quite equal to the moral. He fell upon a slight thing like Colman's *Musical Lady* with the following words:

A person would almost wonder how it was possible to knead so much dramatical flour and water into any sort of consistence without a grain of salt, or how a compound so perfectly insipid could be in the least relished by the sensible palate of an English audience.

He liked "fine reflections" in a play, and was not too hospitable to farcical rough-and-tumble. In 1763 this department of the *Court Magazine* was reduced to mere notes of news about performances and to a "calendar"; in 1764 and 1765 we meet merely the usual "accounts" of new plays. It is noticeable that the critic, when he came to speak a few words of comment upon Samuel Foote's play, *The Commissary*, threw aside "the laws of criticism" and told in informal terms what kind of entertainment he had had.

The most continuous magazine criticism of the theatre during the decade is to be found in the *Universal Museum, or Gentleman's and Ladies' Polite Magazine of History, Politics and Literature*, later called the *Universal Museum and Complete Maga-*

*zine of Knowledge and Pleasure.* This magazine was edited by John Seally, who is described in Baker's *Biographia Dramatica* (1811) as having become in his later days "lazy gentleman, the author and dramatic censor." The *Universal Museum* commenced with No. I., January, 1762, and continued to the end of 1770. Among the aims of the author of a series of essays in it, called "The Town," was that of writing "essays on the theatre, and other species of literature, calculated to promote the cause of polite learning, and repress the insolence of word-catching critics." But the part which interests us particularly is the section called "The Theatre." The January issue contains several critical paragraphs on the plays which had been produced at the two theatres during the month: upon *The Conscious Lovers*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Love for Love*, and *The Alchemist*, and upon Garrick's acting in the last-named play and in *Macbeth*. The critic seems especially interested in the details of Garrick's acting and writes very vividly about some of his performances. Every month there appear these critical paragraphs, dealing with both new and old plays, but dealing with all briefly. The series does give, however, some very clear glimpses into the theatrical seasons of 1761-62 and 1762-63. The student of Garrick's art will find many details here of the way he played *Macbeth*, *Ranger* in *The Suspicious Husband*, *Posthumus*, *Bayes* in *The Rehearsal*, *King Lear*. The criticism of new plays is likely to be lenient, except towards the lighter comic operas and pantomimes and farces. A play like Whitehead's *School for Lovers* or Mrs. Griffith's *Platonic Wife* is treated with sympathy. There is a long essay in the issue for October, 1762, discussing the alterations which Garrick had made in *Romeo and Juliet*: alterations in Shakespeare were thought by this critic to be usually for the worse; Tate's *Lear* was deplored; the elimination of Rosaline from *Romeo and Juliet* and of the early scenes in which Juliet appears seemed objectionable; the balcony scene by being played without a balcony was transformed into a

"stage-level tête-à-tête"; the funeral procession which the eighteenth-century managers had introduced into the fourth act he called a "grand raree-show"; but the waking scene in the tomb, which was perhaps the one tolerable alteration of Shakespeare in the century, was felt to be admissible. There is also an excellent article on the flood of musical entertainments. Sometimes "*The Theatre*" is the first article in the magazine and is really ambitious; at other times we find merely short paragraphs of "theatrical intelligence." In 1767, November, a new series called "*The Theatrical Inspector*" commenced; the series ran to No. V, March, 1768. These articles are longer, as a rule, and more pretentious than the earlier ones; but they contain very little good writing. During the last two years of the decade the *Universal Museum* published almost nothing but the conventional "accounts" which are to be found in any other periodical. The other magazine said to have been edited by John Seally, the *Freeholder's Magazine; or Monthly Chronicle of Liberty*, September, 1769, to August, 1770, contained these "accounts" and very little comment beyond them. As the *Biographia Dramatica* also gives to the credit of John Seally a publication called *Dramatic Strictures*, it is possible that we meet his writing again when a series under that title appears in the *General Evening Post* in 1772, or when another under the same title, signed "Hic et ubique," appears in the *St. James's Chronicle*, 1771-72.

The *Court Miscellany, or Ladies' New Magazine . . . by Matilda Wentworth of Piccadilly and others* commenced in July, 1765. Theatrical intelligence was a regular part of the periodical; this section consisted chiefly of news of the theatres and of insignificant comment. Some of the articles were reprinted from newspapers during the next few years. "Accounts" of new plays were frequent; the comments added to them showed something of independence.

Tobias Smollett's *British Magazine*, 1760-1767, noticed the new plays which appeared, told the story of the play, and

sometimes added a few comments. The *Weekly Amusement*, 1763-67, published only a very infrequent "account" of a new play. The story of a little eight-page periodical called the *Fort-night's Register, or a Chronicle of Interesting and Remarkable Events, Foreign and Domestic*, is brief but interesting from our point of view: it commenced July 29-August 12, 1762, and has been examined to No. XI, December 18-January 1, 1763; at first there is no mention of the theatres; then news notes begin to appear, "theatrical intelligence"; then in No. VIII appears a long article which takes up one-fourth of the space of the paper, discussing the acting of Quin and of Love as Falstaff, and that of Jackson as Oroonoko (quoted "from Royal Chronicle or British Evening Post"), and No. IX reverts again to short notes. *Critical Memoirs of the Times: Containing a Summary View of the Popular Pursuits, Political Debates, and Literary Productions of the Present Age*, January to June, 1769, in its preliminary plan named the theatres as one of the objects of the miscellaneous essays of which it was to be composed. The dramatic critic, who may have been William Kenrick, the scurrilous journalist,<sup>27</sup> spent most of his time attacking with unnecessary bitterness the managers, both Colman and Garrick. Any fault in any play or performance was brought round to the door of the manager. The essays are full of spite and are of no critical value.

In this period there is an increase in the number of periodicals devoted almost exclusively to news and discussions of the theatres and the drama. The *Theatrical Review; or Annals of the Drama* commenced in January, 1763. The editor declared in his Introduction that he was happy that "nothing has now a

<sup>27</sup> Boaden, James. *Private Corr. of David Garrick*, Vol. I, p. 333. Mr. J. Sharp writes to Garrick, February, 1769: "I am told that Mr. Kenrick is one of the principal conductors of the critical memoirs of the times. He is like enough, I think to have wrote the splenetic account of Covent Garden Theatre in the last number."

chance of succeeding that has not an apparent tendency to improve"; the triumph of sentimental drama, it appears, seemed to him complete. His plan in this periodical was to give a dissertation on the drama, short lives of the dramatic poets of England, impartial examinations of the performers' abilities, criticism of the directors of theatres, accounts of new dramatic pieces, a department of theatrical anecdotes, a little original poetry, and copperplates for illustrative embellishments. Five numbers of the periodical appeared, and are full of discussions of these subjects, but without much lively writing. We find an essay attacking opera; another giving the life of Edward Alleyn the Elizabethan actor; another, the life of Joseph Addison; another on Garrick's abilities; another on the policy of allowing spectators to enter at half-price when the play is half played; another on the new tragedy, *Elvira*, or the new comedy, *The Discovery*. In the criticisms of plays and prologues, the critic tends to attack line by line and to carry out to tedious lengths his examination of defects in writing; he is a fierce opponent of Italian opera on moral grounds; yet he will not be satisfied with anaemic Augustan tragedies like Mallet's *Elvira*—"Bless us, what a sweet consistent piece of business is a modern tragedy"—he has a sharp eye for offensive political allusions. In June he takes his leave of his readers until October; but the periodical did not resume publication then. Some paragraphs of criticism of new and old plays are to be found in *The Theatrical Register, or a Complete List of Every Performer at the different Theatres, for the Year 1769, Illustrated with Critical Observations*—a theatrical annual. The dregs of theatrical journalism are to be tasted in such a publication as the *Theatrical Monitor: or Green Room Laid Open; with Remarks Thereon, which occasioned the Letter to Mr. Spatter, Saturday, October 17, 1767*. This was a pamphlet complaining of Colman's management of the Haymarket Theatre, especially the treatment of Mr. and Mrs. Yates which was arousing partisan feeling through the town. The

"Monitor" has some things to say about newspaper criticism which were very frequent gossip in those days, as now:

The contempt and indignity shewn to Mr and Mrs. Yates, who are presumed to meet with a determined rejection in one house, and a refusal of the just *reward of merit* in the other; the coalition of the *Gazetteer* with the *Public Advertiser* (wherein are the *genuine Green-room paragraphs* inserted for the *Patagonians*, and such characters that require to be puffed off) the *St James's Chronicle*, and other papers, whereby true criticism, public remarks, tyrannical complaints, and the check of the public, are at least impeded, if not attempted to be frustrated, are things which certainly should excite proper suspicions, and a new channel to be opened for introducing public right and public liberty over the theatres. 'Tis therefore presumed that the public will look on the above papers as partial and servile, and that as they have deserted the public, the public will find a new method of being relieved

The "remarks" alluded to in the title are a letter to the *Monitor* from the editor of the *Public Ledger*, the one prominent newspaper which had been left out of the indictment:

The *Ledger*, it is true, is the only channel in which the Public can at present expect to be gratified with theatrical disquisitions; but to make these disquisitions of value they must be founded on reason, and divested as well of injudicious partiality, as virulent resentment . . . It does not follow, because the managers have neglected their own interest in declining to advertise with us, that we should neglect the regard which is due to our character, and set them up in a kind of literary pillory to be pelted at by every little Writer, who mistakes malevolence for capacity, and wants to indulge the gall of his private spleen, under the shield of our public impartiality

The "Monitor" in reply indulges "the gall of his private spleen" and writes in a scurrilous, half-intelligible style. It occurred to him during the passage of these letters that he might make a periodical out of the warfare; hence he promised a second *Monitor*. In No. II the writer apologized for the rough, plain-speaking style which he must adopt for his dirty job of cleaning up the Augean stables of stage conditions. He proceeded to use this style to belabor Garrick and the other managers and to ac-

cuse them of buying the press and of abusing their patent rights. His papers continued to be printed until as late as December, 1768, but only the first nine numbers are extant (No. IX, December 19, 1767). Garrick's friends in their letters to him speak of this periodical in terms of most scathing denunciation.<sup>28</sup> The *Monitor* called forth a rival publication, the *Covent Garden Chronicle*, of which No. II, March 9, 1768, is extant. In this paper a correspondent speaks of the *Theatrical Monitor* as "such an *unclean bird* that he can scarcely be allowed to be *game*"; but the paper itself makes no effective counterblast to the *Monitor*. As a rule, however, this kind of paper warfare was carried on by separate pamphlets rather than by a periodical; there are innumerable remains of such struggles. When the original purpose of fighting for a cause was accomplished, there might be in addition some more or less partial criticism of the drama and of acting.

From our knowledge of Garrick's connection with the newspapers during this decade and from the recriminations which pass back and forth between correspondents to the newspapers, we are inclined to suspect that it may be true, as Professor Allardyce Nicoll suggests, that it was an era of a venal press. But whereas Professor Nicoll's description is meant to cover the whole of the latter half of the century, we must limit its application to this decade between 1760 and 1770.

The press [he writes]<sup>29</sup> from all accounts, was in a low and servile state during most of these years. A little judicious payment could

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<sup>28</sup> Boaden, J. *Private Corr of D. Garrick*, Vol I, p 276-77 (from George Saville Carey). ". . . for in my opinion, there was never published anything more puerile, invidious, and exceptionable . . ."; and *ibid.*, Vol I, p. 327 (from Charles Macklin) ". . . strange and malignant falsehoods are published by theatrical mercenaries in defiance of all decency, etc.", and MS in Forster MSS (from Samuel Foote) ". . . a paper stigmatized here for its virulence . . ."

<sup>29</sup> Nicoll, Allardyce *Eighteenth Century Drama, 1750-1800*, Cambridge University Press, 1927, p 12.

secure the insertion of paragraphs true and false; and portraits of the money-seeking printers and publishers of the news-sheets are drawn for us again and again . . . References to the art and science of theatrical puffing are many.

Certainly there appeared in the newspapers during this decade little writing of any value as criticism. The short notes which are appended to the summaries of plots of new plays may have been sent out from the playhouses or may not. In either case they are of almost no importance.

Yet it must be said that the new plays are now fairly certain to receive comments in the public press somewhere. The magazines give most space to such comments and have published some readable and significant reviews of the contemporary plays. In what criticism we are able to find we notice that the triumph of sentimentalism seems established. Just as in the drama itself this decade marks the capture of serious comedy and even tragedy by this disease of feeling, so the critics seemed to have capitulated without a struggle. Beginning with a general statement that "nothing has now a chance of succeeding that has not an apparent tendency to improve," we move on to condemnation of the immorality of Restoration comedy and the welcoming of such purely sentimental pieces as Whitehead's *School for Lovers* and Mrs. Griffith's *Platonic Wife*. The pathetic element in tragedy is also placed uppermost in criticism. But there is hardly enough material to permit us to draw very convincing conclusions about the state of popular taste in drama.

## CHAPTER V

1770-1780

In the decade which we now reach theatrical criticism at last arrives at a respectable position in English journalism. By the end of the period hardly one of the larger newspapers failed to carry paragraphs on the performances, and even in more or less responsible manner to criticize them. A new play was sure to be reported in about a dozen newspapers, though the accounts might vary from a mere summary of the plot to a thorough-going impartial critique of a column or two in length. Actors might count on reports of their débuts or on their first attempts in new parts. The newspapers considered that they were called upon to keep watch over the daily offerings in the playhouses, not merely the novelties but the established repertory itself. The older newspapers came to the custom slowly, through tentative publishing of correspondence, occasional essays, and reports of novelties. But eventually most of them gave room to regular series of criticisms. The new papers which were set up at this time gave unusual space to theatrical criticism, perhaps because two of the most important of them, the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Morning Post*, were edited by men who were especially interested in the theatre and were ready to write the critiques themselves. These men, however, are not the only critics to be identified during this period. We come to a time now when it is possible to name the critics who wrote anonymously for the newspapers and to group their writings together for study. We have already seen that the magazines had developed their departments of theatrical criticism to a rather high point in the

last decade; we find them carrying on these departments and furnishing solid critical articles to supplement the more hasty compositions for the daily press.

- The period becomes especially interesting to us also because of the subjects which the critics could attack. It was the period of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's best dramatic work; we can see how the audiences responded to *The Rivals*, *The Duenna*, *The School for Scandal*, *A Trip to Scarborough*, and *The Critic*. Furthermore, Goldsmith's *She Stoops To Conquer* was produced in 1773. It has been customary to look upon the era as one of "reaction" against the sentimental comedy and of return to the true comedy of manners in the work of these two dramatists. While there were these and other vigorous attempts to discredit the tearful comedy, the taste was too strong to be eradicated. Sentimental comedy recovered from the shock almost at once; Richard Cumberland and Hugh Kelly still produced popular plays of the sort and defended their works in statements which they well knew would be accepted by the public. It is thus a dramatic period in the history of taste.

While it is perhaps enough that one decade should produce such a group of plays as those of Sheridan and Goldsmith, it must be said that these were overwhelmed by a flood of insipid tragedies, comedies, farces, operas, and spectacles, which made up the staple food of the theatrical public. Of course the repertory of the theatres contained many plays of Shakespeare and the older dramatists. When theatrical critics saw their task as something broader than the mere recognition of the new plays, the repertory provided plenty of material for critical writing. The *London Chronicle* critic back in 1757 and 1758 preferred to devote his energies to reviewing the older plays as presented by the contemporary stage performers. Hazlitt in his career also spoke seldom of the new plays but focussed his attention upon the presentation of Shakespeare. Most theatrical critics, however, in 1775 as now, have busied themselves chiefly with

new plays, not with day-by-day recording of the art of the actors and producers, whose chief productions in the earlier day were the old plays of an established repertory. Consequently much of the critical writing has to do with plays which are of little interest nowadays except to the historian.

David Garrick closed his career as an actor during this period. His final performances of famous parts were reviewed in a number of papers and we thus have a picture of the art of this actor such as no other earlier actor had been fortunate enough to leave. The work of the theatrical critics of the daily newspapers has in some measure defeated the fatal fleetiness of the actors' art which has always been lamented by those actors and their friends.

With this increased amount of criticism we must deal in a less detailed way. We may indicate the tendencies in the ideas and methods of innumerable writers of small paragraphs, but may not deal so fully with any one of them as with earlier critics. A student of the drama of the period would do well to look more closely at the writings of these contemporary critics for the judgments of the audiences and for marks of the changing tastes.

The files of the *Public Ledger* are so incomplete that it has not always been possible to follow the developments of the critical department. In 1771 however we come upon a continuous series of criticisms which, because it was later issued in book form, we can study thoroughly. On September 25, 1771, appeared in the *Ledger* the first number of "The Theatrical Review. By a Society of Gentlemen Independent of Managerial Influence." The series continued at least as late as No. LXXII, March 20, 1772. The *London Evening Post* began immediately to reprint the articles from the *Ledge*, and continued to do so up to No. XI, which it printed in the issue for October 19-22, 1771. In September, however, the *General Evening Post* had already begun to reprint the articles also. Hence we can follow

the series in the *General* up to the issue of November 28-30, 1771. In the meantime correspondents of the *General Evening Post* had been busy writing answers to the strictures which the “Gentlemen Independent of Managerial Influence” had been passing upon plays and players. “The Theatrical Review” came to an end, then, some time in 1772. The *Public Ledger* seems to content itself from then on with mere “accounts” and with short notes of “Theatrical Intelligence,” until September, 1774, when a new series, “A Companion to the Playhouse,” begins.<sup>1</sup> On account of the imperfection of the files nothing can be said about the extent or character of this series. And for the rest of the decade we have to be content with short notes and “accounts”; but a long review of *The Rivals* on January 18, 1775, suggests that there may have been more important writing on the theatre occasionally.

“The Theatrical Review” has been attributed to John Potter.<sup>2</sup> But at this time Hugh Kelly was editor of the *Public Ledger* and may have had something to do with the “Review.” To this same Potter is attributed the series which appeared earlier in a number of papers, *The Theatrical Register; or Weekly Rosciad*, in 1766-67.<sup>3</sup> Potter had had a varied career, as editor of the *Devonshire Inspector* at Exeter, lecturer on music at Gresham College and author of a book on music, author of prologues and epilogues for Garrick, and writer of songs to be sung at Vauxhall Gardens. By the time he wrote the “Theatrical Review” he is said to have quarreled with Garrick, probably over the criticisms in the “Rosciad” of 1766. A postscript to the first number of the “Review” gives a hint of the plan to be pursued in the publication:

<sup>1</sup> *Public Ledger*, September 22: “A companion to the Playhouse” No. II—a violent diatribe against Garrick, even dragging in private scandal.

<sup>2</sup> Lowe, R. W. *A Bibliographical Account of English Theatrical Literature*, London, 1888, p. 335. Also see *Dictionary of National Biography*: “John Potter.”

<sup>3</sup> See *ante*, pp. 159-61

As the Authors of this Work have determined to prosecute their Plan with unremitting Vigilance and Impartiality, they wish to open a Correspondence with the Curious and the Learned, and will think themselves highly favoured to receive occasional Observations from them, which shall be honoured with the strictest Attention and Candour.

The criticisms are rather pedantic reviews of plays new and old, though they show a hearty enjoyment of the theatre. They are full of the conventional critical terms of the century. Potter seems not to have been able to free himself from them. His criticism of Shakespeare is largely taken from Dr. Johnson's remarks in his recent edition of the plays. Where he differs from Johnson he usually shows a less robust taste, more oppressed by the "sensibility" of the age. On the other hand he is sometimes more ready to allow the effect of a play on the stage to weigh more with him than the effect got by reading. He subscribes to Dr. Johnson's characterization of *Cymbeline* but declares that the infinite beauties make up for the faults and absurdities. He is, however, ready to praise the alterations which had been made by the producers. Likewise he approves of Nahum Tate's version of *King Lear* and of the new ending put to *Romeo and Juliet* by Garrick. He is more appreciative of *As You Like It* than Johnson had been:

This inimitable Comedy does great honour to its immortal Author as it is one of the most pleasing pastoral Dramas on the English Stage. The Incidents are numerous, and though few of them are striking, they are in general pleasing. New Characters appear from time to time in continual Succession, and most of them are well supported. The Scenes are interchangeably diversified with Merriment and Solemnity, but some of them are very trifling, and rather retard than promote the general Design. The Unities are repeatedly broken, and the Catastrophe is not very happily produced. The comic Dialogue (as Dr. Johnson observes) is very sprightly, with less mixture of low Buffoonery, than in some other of Shakespeare's Plays; and the graver Part is elegant and harmonious.

This is an example of Potter's inability to fuse a genuine pleasure in a play with his criticism of it. These phrases are not

wholly lacking in Dr. Johnson himself, but Johnson is not tied to them. Of *Richard III* Potter says that the play has some noble scenes, that "parts are trifling, others shocking, and some improbable." He rises to sentimental raptures over Tate's version of *Lear*:

What mind is so pleased with melancholy Ideas, or the struggles of injured virtue in distress, as not to receive much heart-felt satisfaction, in the last Scene, where *Edgar* and *Cordelia*, surmounting all difficulties, are made happy in each other's love, as a reward for their loyalty and virtue?

His critical position may be seen in his remarks about *Twelfth Night*, which he places second only to the *Merry Wives of Windsor* among the comedies!

It is true it does not exhibit a just picture of life, and, on this account, fails to produce instruction, which should be the grand aim of the Drama; but as all amusements do not professedly unite themselves with instruction, tho' 'tis best when they do; surely, a Piece full of exquisite entertainment, founded on innocent circumstances, displaying Characters inoffensive in themselves, and Dialogue untainted, either with Licentiousness or obscenity, is entitled to a considerable degree of approbation . . . The Plot of this Piece is well contrived, and the Incidents, in general, are sufficiently probable to be pleasing. The characters are numerous, and marked with great variety tho' some of them are not exact portraits of nature, they are not so much on the extreme, as either to disgust, or be unpleasing. A more innocent set of beings were probably never grouped together. If any of them can be said to be reprehensible, it is *Olivia*, whose sudden love for *Viola* in man's attire, and precipitate marriage with *Sebastian*, through the mistake of dress, is not altogether consistent with a woman in her exalted situation; and yet we frequently meet with instances of this sort, in real life, which derive their origin from chaste love, and have their foundation in the principles of honour and virtue.

In a review of *The Grecian Daughter* by Arthur Murphy, February 26, 1772, another statement of this position is found:

Poetry avowedly professes to have in view two grand ends, viz to charm the imagination with the spirited loveliness of fancy; and to instruct the heart, by inculcating the most social and moral Precepts

Upon the new plays which were produced during the year and upon others which were in the repertory of the theatres Potter is carefully and heavily judicial and is particularly careful to point out what he considers moral lapses, like the portrayal of Lothario in a pleasing light or the "frequent execrations" in Rowe's *Tamerlane*. *Love for Love* he would commit to oblivion because of its want of chastity, its "vein of licentiousness"; and he is equally hard upon *The Provoked Wife*, which he says is produced merely because of the vanity and avarice of the managers. He complains of Farquhar's *Recruiting Officer* that one seldom meets with a moral in it. To the performances of the actors he gives minute attention at times, commenting freely upon their interpretations of well-known characters. But there is nothing very lively in the writing at any time. It without doubt represents admirably a great body of public opinion at this time.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore it is regular theatrical criticism, it comments upon the current theatre, both upon new plays and upon the new productions of old plays.

We have seen that by the end of the preceding decade the *St. James's Chronicle* had become apparently a mere organ for praise of current plays in the houses of all the managers. Near the end of 1771 a critic who signed himself "Hic et ubique" began to write "Dramatic Strictures" in this paper. These were long critical essays with enough character in them to draw the fire of many correspondents. The early issues of 1772 are full of letters in reply to "Hic et ubique." The last of the "Dramatic Strictures" was published in the issue for March 3-5, 1772. The subjects of the essays were chiefly the plays of Shakespeare and other established classics, with particular attention to the

<sup>4</sup>In the "Advertisement" to the published volumes of the *Theatrical Review* the author comments upon the favorable reception which it met with "from all ranks of people" *The Theatrical Review* in two volumes published a register of plays from September 25, 1771, to April, 1772, with paragraphs of criticism. The *Ledger* articles were probably somewhat revised for this reprint.

acting of the various parts. The critic's attitude towards the new plays may be judged from his note (January 23-25) saying that he would not judge *The Fashionable Lover*, by Richard Cumberland, until he had seen it more often and until the managers and author had made their money by it. He did however discuss the Garrick alteration of Wycherley's *Country Wife*, called *The Country Girl*; his chief criticism was that the alteration, while it had tried to purify the play, had really taken away all its vital force. His reviews of performances of Jonson's *Volpone* and of *Twelfth Night* contained first a paragraph of praise for the play and a statement of the theme; and then they went into long descriptions of the interpretations of the parts by the several actors. The most ambitious paper, however, was one on *Hamlet* which required much space in three issues of the newspaper, February 18-20, February 20-22, and March 3-5. The first dealt with the play; it was an excellent discussion of the progress of the resolution of revenge in the mind of Hamlet and the gradual disintegration of that purpose; the critic was inclined to criticize Shakespeare for having let the revenge, so well worked up, end in a heap of bloody actions. The second paper dealt with the current performance of the part of Hamlet by Garrick; it gave a great many details of the acting of Garrick and makes interesting reading. "Hic et ubique" mingled admiration and advice; he found Garrick's expression of sorrow too feminine, not princely enough; he thought that Garrick's actions in the presence of the Ghost, however, were marvelous in their effect, for they made the Ghost actually seem a spirit; he felt that Garrick had been too severe in his treatment of Ophelia; he disliked the rant in the grave and would have liked to see the scene omitted from the performance; he advised a "low, tremulous tone" throughout the closet scene. It is this kind of writing which makes one regret that more such critics did not find more regular berths on the journals all through the century; the record of theatrical art would become vastly more .

vivid than it now is. The third paper on *Hamlet* dealt with the performances of the other characters; it contained a good paragraph on each of the other chief actors, with first a sketch of Shakespeare's conception of the character. "Hic et ubique" unfortunately spent the rest of the space allotted to him during these few months in defending himself against the charges of partiality towards Drury Lane Theatre. In the meantime the paper published occasional paragraphs of "Theatrical Intelligence," none of which was much more than a report. In the autumn of 1772 the comments upon new performers became frequent. A certain "R. M." appeared for a moment as the critic (October 8-10). Once in a while a longer letter of criticism would appear: on *The Duel*, a new comedy by William O'Brien (December 12-15); on the altered version of *Hamlet* (December 19-22); on *Zara*, adapted by Aaron Hill from Voltaire, (November 10-12). This last-named review compared the play in detail with Corneille's *Polyeucte*, called it an imitation of *Othello*, gave its stage history, and discussed the acting of Garrick and Reddish in the main parts. The early part of 1775 saw only a few paragraphs about the theatres in the *St. James's Chronicle*; the chief thing was a warm controversy about *She Stoops to Conquer*. The critique published the day after the play had been produced for the first time praised the design of the author (to "combat the prevailing humour for Sentimental Comedy, by setting an opposite example"), noticed the mingling of comedy, sentiment, and farce (rather too much attempt at times to get laughs), and finally declared emphatically that this play warranted public approbation because it was the only new comedy which had appeared for several years.<sup>5</sup> A long reply to this criticism was sent in by a correspondent immediately: the reply attacked the initial situation as one appropriate only for farce, the characters as lacking in originality, and other details of the play.<sup>6</sup> In return this letter drew replies from other

<sup>5</sup> *St. James's Chronicle*, March 13-16, 1773.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, March 18-20.

correspondents. In the fall of 1775 the notes become more frequent and they have a uniform tone of mockery that gives them what passes for character. Through 1774 a section called "The Theatre" reports with some regularity on the performances at both theatres. The critic may be the same as in the preceding year, for there is some of the same mocking tone. He appears, however, to have some of the point of view of the critic in the theatre; he recognizes the importance of the study of an audience's reactions, and he distinguishes between a play on the stage and one in the study. He writes in a chatty, good-humoured style and makes some lively reading. During the course of 1775 the series dwindles to very infrequent, short notes, of no interest whatever. Not even Sheridan's *Rivals* draws a criticism. At the beginning of 1776 a new start is made, a start which is announced by the editors of the newspaper in the issue for January 11-13:

Several Reasons have occurred to prevent the regular Execution of this Part of our Plan, which is, to give our Readers a concise and impartial Account of Theatrical Entertainments, and to mark with Candour whatever may be important in the way of Merit or Demerit in the Administration of our Theatrical Potentates, or in the Performance of their Ministers or Servants. We pledge our Credit with the Publick, and that to us is everything, that we have no Connections on the one Hand or Resentments on the other, which may make us partial or illiberal in our Observations. Our Accounts will not be those which are *prepared*, and sometimes even in the Press before an Entertainment or an Actor can have appeared on the Stage. We shall always await an actual Representation. This with the best Part of our Readers, we are sure will be an Excuse, if, while we are not so early as some other Papers, we prove ourselves less partial

The Entertainments of the Theatres were never of greater Importance than at present to the Pleasure and Morals of the Publick. This is our Reason for bringing into a regular Plan what we have hitherto pursued only in occasional and desultory Articles.

With this declaration a somewhat unsympathetic, faultfinding, rationalistic critic sets to work in a series of regular paragraphs. His impartiality appears rather to be an equal contempt for the

managers, unless his dislike for Garrick and his influence be the greater. The *St. James's Chronicle* begins, therefore, to take a considerably different position in regard to Garrick and Colman than it had been notorious for earlier.

It had been known about town many years earlier that Garrick owned stock in two or three newspapers and was on very friendly terms with the editors of those and other papers. The published correspondence of Garrick and some unpublished letters which are to be seen at the Victoria and Albert Museum Library reveal many underground transactions between the actor-manager and his journalistic friends. It is not always easy to fit the clues into a complete story, but it is fairly clear that Garrick watched very closely over the nurture of his reputation by the press. He was quick to resent attack and was active in attempts to persuade men to praise him. Although he claims never except in one instance to have written his own "puffs," there is some evidence that he was at least furthering his business interests in the competition of the theatres by writing up the performances in which he was interested. And furthermore his widow, many years after his death, told Edmund Kean that David always wrote his own criticisms. It is to be hoped that our research so far is at least more trustworthy than the old lady's memory, but it must be said that there appears to have been some foundation for even so egregious an exaggeration. It was certainly believed in his day that Garrick "bought" the press. In a satire called *The Theatres*, by "Sir Nicholas Nipclose," 1772, we read:

The *London Packet*,\* the *St. James's* join  
To vend the puffs which I and Davy coin:  
(i.e. *Colman and Garrick*)

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\* Note: Two evening papers, of which the managers are proprietors; therefore every defence of their impositions and absurdities, however vague, is greedily admitted; indeed we believe everything favourable is written by *themselves*, for certainly no other person, save a fool or a flatterer, would undertake so impracticable a justification.

We, pleaders like, though at the public bar  
 We wrangle fiercely, wage no hostile war;  
 Behind the curtain we shake hands and smile,  
 United BUBBLE MASTERS of this isle.

<sup>1</sup> Another pamphlet, *A Letter to David Garrick Esq. from William Kenrick LL.D*, 2d Edition, London 1772, was even more specific:

Tho' humble Hiffernan in pay I keep  
 Still my fast friend, when he is fast asleep;  
 Tho' long the Hodmandod my friend hath been,  
 With the land-tortoise earth'd at Turnham Green\*  
 Tho' Harry Woodfall, Baldwin, Evans, Say†  
 My puffs in fairest order full display.  
 Impartially insert each friendly *pro*,  
 Suppressing every *con* of every foe;  
 . . . . .  
 Tho' shambling Becket proud to soothe my pride,  
 Keeps ever shuffling on my right-hand side. . . .

But Kenrick next called attention to signs that already the reign of the great "Roscius" was breaking. Rivals and critics, in press and on the stage, were appearing. Still another *Letter to David Garrick, Esq., on his Conduct as Principal Manager and Actor at Drury Lane*, written in 1772 by a David Williams, declares that all of Garrick's reputation as actor and manager is to be traced to his ownership of shares in the newspapers and reviews. One of Garrick's enemies at this time was Thomas Davies, the bookseller at whose shop Dr. Johnson met James Boswell. Davies had failed as an actor and had taken to book-selling and journalism. He wrote essays in prose and verse in the *St. James's Chronicle*,<sup>7</sup> and is suspected of being the "Anti-Mendax" who attacked Garrick in that paper in 1774. Although

\* (Editors of *Monthly and Critical Reviews*.)

† (Editors and printers of newspapers, well known to the public for their impartiality in regard to Roscius.)

<sup>7</sup> Nichols, John. *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. VI, . p. 434.

in earlier days Garrick had been amused by the disturbance caused to the feelings of Becket, the printer of the *St. James's*, by Baldwin the editor, when he allowed articles attacking Garrick to be printed;<sup>8</sup> at that time, apparently, it was good business for the antagonism to be suggested. There is much more disturbance among Garrick's party over the "Anti-Mendax" articles, and in 1775 Baldwin's independence as the conductor of a newspaper causes a final breach with his fellow-proprietor of the *St. James's Chronicle*. Garrick writes to Colman on June 25 that he will dine with him anywhere but in the company of "that worthy gentleman, Mr. Baldwin," whom he had previously been kind to and who now had abused and insulted him. The author of the "abuse" may with a fair degree of certainty be identified as George Steevens, the editor of Shakespeare.<sup>9</sup>

Just when Steevens began to write theatrical criticism in the *St. James's Chronicle* cannot be exactly stated. John Nichols says, "A slight perusal of a file of the early volumes of the *St. James's Chronicle* would furnish an ample store of the jocular and severe ebullitions of Mr. Steevens's fertile imagination."<sup>10</sup> He very soon became notorious among his acquaintances for his mischievous, if not altogether malicious, attacks upon them in the newspapers. One of his friends called him "one of the wisest, most learned, but most spiteful of men." Dr. Johnson was inclined to defend him from the violent indignation of nearly everybody else, but himself wrote, "He came to live the life of an outlaw. The warmth of his temper put him at variance with so

<sup>8</sup> Peake, R. B. *Memoirs of the Colman Family*, Vol I, p. 191 · a letter from Garrick to Colman, February 15, 1767 The letter is not, however, entirely intelligible.

<sup>9</sup> "In the midst of a most friendly correspondence he began an abuse on me and Mr. Colman in 'The St. James's Chronicle,' after which I would never converse with him." Boaden, J. *Private Correspondence of David Garrick*, Vol II, pp 361-62 (Mr Garrick to ——, [no date]

<sup>10</sup> Nichols, John *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, 1828, Vol V, p 433, note

many of his acquaintances and he wished to avoid them.”<sup>11</sup> In some instances the quarrels with his friends are known to have been owing to his criticism of their plays, or, in the case of actors, of their performances. It is likely that the critical notes which we have been surveying in the columns of the *St. James's Chronicle* for 1774 and 1775 were from his pen. When we come to 1776 and 1777 we have clearer evidence, and are justified in reading the criticisms as the work of this “Puck of Commentators.” At the time when the publisher of the *St. James's* was explaining to his readers that theatrical criticism would henceforth take a more prominent and regular place in the newspaper, Steevens was writing to Garrick, with whom he was up to that time on friendly terms, that he had not been to any plays during the present season (1775-76) except “your ‘Alexander the Pig’” and *Zara*, “when I was only sorry that the catastrophe in the fifth act was not in earnest.” He wrote also that he had been given a place on the “liberty-list” to Covent Garden Theatre, but had declined to use it and thus to feel restrained from saying what he felt about the performances. It is probable that by this time he was recognized as one of the critics of the theatrical entertainments of the town.<sup>12</sup>

During the season 1776-77 he is steadily at work in his peculiar style of criticism. He begins with a fling at Garrick and his influence, though he will always be willing to grant that Garrick has been one of the greatest of actors. Indeed he calls him the “sole player of Hamlet for thirty years, . . . though we scorn to join in the indiscriminate and senseless adulation of Mr. Garrick.” He is disgusted with the season’s offerings in new plays and innovations in performances of the old; he finds nothing to talk about. “The young man who has twice appeared at Drury Lane in the character of Jerry Sneak is a Taylor by Trade, and

<sup>11</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*: “George Steevens.”

<sup>12</sup> Boaden, James. *Private Correspondence of David Garrick*, Vol. II, pp. 121-22.

we wish he had kept to his proper Occupation." And Miss Cately is condemned for her indecent singing and dancing—"this vicious and dangerous Syren"—the Government should take action to protect the youth of the nation. When Congreve's *Way of the World* is revived in January, 1777, Steevens likens the managers to "resurrection-men" whose "business is with bodies that should lie in their graves," and complains that they revive old plays because they have not wit, nor is it to their interest, to produce new plays. The same critique, however, contains a very interesting analysis of the character of Polonius, which is brought forward to destroy if possible the tradition which causes Polonius to be played on the stage as a mere buffoon. Steevens believes that "Hamlet treats him . . . with Contempt as a servile Courtier, not as a Man wanting Understanding." Again, when Richard Savage's tragedy, *Sir Thomas Overbury*, is adapted by William Woodfall for presentation, Steevens brings all his caustic wit to bear upon the managers for their failure to recognize and support living genius, as they had failed to recognize Savage in his day. His manner of attack upon a new play is exemplified in the following extracts from his review of Arthur Murphy's comedy, *Know Your Own Mind*, February 22, 1777:

Mr Murphy . . . is well known as a very peculiar Compiler of Plays. He has proceeded in preparing the present Comedy in the usual Manner, has borrowed his Plot and the Outlines of his Characters from *L'Irresolu* of D'Estouches, and finished the whole by allotting to his Personages smart Sayings, comical Puns, and sentimental Sentences from his Common-place Book. . . .

Mr. Murphy, understanding the present State of Factions in the World of Taste has acted in the Business of this Play like a judicious and prudent Lawyer. Disputes run light between the sickly, enervated, and profligate Lovers of Sentiment and the vulgar Grinners and Laughers. He has aimed to please both Parties. . . . The Play was well received but the Play-houses are now almost deserted by Persons of Taste, Fashion, and Letters, who seem disposed to see French Comedies and Tragedies in their first and original Shape before mangled and mutilated by Plagiaries and Translators.

It was this last review which called forth a letter from a reader of the *St. James's Chronicle*, characterizing the author of the criticism in the manner in which that author would write such a characterization himself:

*Master STEEVEN* is well known as a very peculiar *Compiler* of Scandal and defamation. He has proceeded in criticising the new Comedy in his usual manner: he has hashed up all that he ever said about former plays, and finished the whole with part extracts from his common-place book, which had been pretty well emptied with an EDITION of SHAKESPEARE. *Master STEEVEN* is truly and exactly what ought to be understood by the term CRITIC. Furnish him with a LIE he will swallow it, and run about the town, with that *flush* in his cheek which in some constitutions proceeds from indigestion, and with that *tremulous eye* which is a sure indication of a dastardly spirit meditating mischief. The LIE, once gulped down, operates in *Master STEEVEN* as an *absorbent*; it sucks in the *morbid matter* that gathers about his heart, and comes out in the *St. James's Chronicle*, swelled with the additional venom of his own nature. Like all imitative and second-hand critics, *Master STEEVEN* is extremely apt to overcharge his abuse; he never can tell whether a character is drawn after nature. His *doings* in every family, where he gains admittance, are such as would, if exhibited in a comedy, exceed theatrical probability. Under pretence of making proposals to a young lady, he gets into a gentleman's house; he then falls in love with the wife and when he has wormed himself into all their secrets, they are thrown into the utmost confusion by his *libels in a news-paper*. His malignity after repeated practice is not sufficiently concealed, to give *éclat* to the discovery of it.

*Master STEEVEN* understanding the present state of faction among the writers of the age, has always acted with singular duplicity, like a skilful Newgate attorney. To the sickly, enervated and profligate lovers of sentiment, he rails at all *wit and humour*; he then runs to the vulgar grimmers and laughers, full charged against *insipid sentiment*. In the out-set of life *Master STEEVEN* had a friend, meek, ingenuous, and diffident: that friend unbosomed himself to *Master STEEVEN*, but after suffering numberless strokes of perfidy, he broke his heart. *Master STEEVEN* continues to run from bookseller to bookseller, from printing-house to printing-house to repeat all the satyrical stories he can collect. You see him with his budget full walking

from Hampstead every morning. Formerly he frequented several persons of known genius, from that connection he borrowed some importance, but he is now fully known, and of course discarded. His laboured letters, epigrams and paragraphs against the friend who gave him a note upon Shakespeare about POTATOES have fixed his character for malice, treachery, and dullness.

Such is the professed critic, *Master STEEVEN*. But criticism is at a low ebb in this country; it is seldom read by persons of fashion, taste, and letters, who seem disposed to peruse *Dacier*, *DuBos*, *Bossu* and others, rather than the virulent productions of such a *ZOILUS* as *Master STEEVEN*.

Of course such a retort was not owing entirely to Steevens's activities as a critic of the theatre; but there is enough in it to suggest his reputation at the time for both scurrilous personal journalism and unsympathetic criticism of plays.

The *St. James's Chronicle* had another critic during this period, perhaps following Steevens whose work cannot be surely found after the spring of 1777. On May 8 there appeared a review of *The School for Scandal*. The tone of this review was so different from that of Steevens that the editors received a few days later (and published on May 13) a letter from a man who lamented the supposed decease of the sharp-tongued critic who would never have let such a piece of nonsense pass without condemnation. The writer speaks in appreciation of the writing of the former *St. James's* critic, who had seemed to him to be the one critic in the town who had not gone over or sold out to the managers of the theatres and who could be relied upon to talk sense rather than indulge in empty puffing. The letter, furthermore, professed to follow the style of the lamented critic, and as a result, we are informed by a note from the printer, some portions of particularly flagrant personal abuse had to be left out of the published version. So much for the influence of George Steevens on theatrical criticism at this time. The critical articles in the *St. James's* in the rest of the months of 1777 are milder in temper, though independent in point of view. It is possible that this critic was Thomas Davies, the bookseller, actor, and biog-

rapher of Garrick. He is said to have written "essays without number, in prose and verse, in the *St. James's Chronicle* and some other of the public newspapers."<sup>13</sup> He had certainly written a criticism many years before upon *The Clandestine Marriage*.<sup>14</sup> He seems to have been identified by his contemporaries as the "Anti-Mendax" who was author of some attacks upon Garrick in the *St. James's Chronicle* in January, 1774.<sup>15</sup> In the *St. James's* for July 4-6, 1776, was a two-column summary of Garrick's character and abilites, signed "Leonato"; but a reprint of it in the *Lottery Magazine* for July, 1776, is signed "T. D." One good critique during 1777 (August 7-9) was signed "D," a review of Henderson in *Richard III*; if this be Davies' work he has changed from enmity to Garrick to something near idolatry of him. Yet we know Davies wrote a biography of Henderson in which he accused Garrick of blocking the path of the rival actor to fame.<sup>16</sup> Somewhere here we have the work of Thomas Davies, but one cannot be certain just where. In 1778 and 1779 we find in the *St. James's Chronicle* brief notes only, which form no considerable body of critical writing.

<sup>13</sup> Nichols, John. *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, Vol VI, p. 434.

<sup>14</sup> Peake, R. B. *Memoirs of the Colman Family*, Vol I, p 181: Letter from Garrick to Colman, April 12, 1766: "Pray when you see Davies, the bookseller, assure him that I bear him no malice, which he is told I do, for having mentioned the vulgarisms in *The Clandestine Marriage*, and that I may convince him that all is well between us, let him know that I was well assured, that he wrote his criticism before he had seen the play. *Quod ert demm."*

<sup>15</sup> Garrick Correspondence in the Forster MSS: a letter signed "Detector," January 11, 1774, informing Garrick that Thomas Davies was author of one of the "Anti-Mendax" letters; a letter from George Steevens to Garrick, August 1, 1774, mentioning Davies in connection with the "Anti-Mendax" letters. Also Boaden, *Private Correspondence of David Garrick*, Vol II, pp 129-30, from Steevens to Garrick, January 26, 1776, again making the identification.

<sup>16</sup> A *Genuine Narrative of the Life and Theatrical Transactions of John Henderson, commonly called The Bath Roscius*. 1777 (2d Edition, 1778)

The *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* began the period with no regular theatrical criticism. It published the plot summaries which were common to many of the papers and as usual it opened its columns to correspondence. In 1775 this correspondence becomes somewhat more voluminous and in the fall of that year regular paragraphs of comment on the plays and players begin. They are, however, little more than reporters' notes and brief judgments. Early in 1776 we find at work on this paper an independent critic who is worthy to take a place alongside the critics of the new journals, the *Morning Post* and the *Morning Chronicle*, who had begun to dignify this section of London newspapers. He is impartial towards the theatres and does not merely copy other critics. His criticisms continue fairly regularly through 1777. By 1778 they are becoming somewhat set in form, but are quite readable and full of good sense. After February only new plays and the appearance of new actors call forth criticism. By this time, then, regular criticism of new entertainments is established in this newspaper.

The critic of the *Gazetteer* during some part of this period can be identified as Mr., or Captain, Cowley, the husband of Mrs. Hannah Cowley, the author of *The Belle's Stratagem* and other comedies. On November 8, 1780, *The Belle's Stratagem* was played at Covent Garden Theatre, where it had had its *première* the season before. In the *Gazetteer* the next morning the critic complained that the comedy had suffered by being allowed to languish for so many months; the new representation went off coldly and languidly, though the excellence of the play did win applause from the audience at last in spite of everything; the actors had not had their parts perfectly in mind and had added jokes of their own which by no means harmonized with the ideas and the careful language of the author of the play. The aftermath of this rather mild castigation of the actors is discovered through the columns of another newspaper, the *British Mercury*. In the first number of a series of paragraphs of

stage gossip under the heading, "The Green-Room Earwig," November 21, 1780, we read:

Now for the Green Room It is all in an uproar The theatrical critic, Mr C——y, of a morning paper, and Mr Aicken, have had a meeting . . . of a *friendly* nature. Reconciliation discharged both their pistols The cause of this meeting was owing to a critique on the performers in the *Belle Stratagem* in which Mr. A—— thought himself indirectly included in its severity.

On November 23, the "Earwig" makes game of letters which Mrs. Cowley had written to the performers of her play, in which it appears that she had complained that the players had begun to act the play in new and strange ways in a spirit of retaliation for "Mr. C——y's critique in the *Gazetteer*."

Such retaliation, she thinks, is cruel; for the critic and the author should be considered as *two distinct persons* This is the first time I ever heard that a man and wife should be considered apart

On December 2, the "Earwig" retails some more gossip about Mr. Cowley: this time a quarrel with the manager over a charge of plagiarism which Cowley had made against Dibdin, author of *The Islanders*, and which threatened the success of the play. We also hear that the actors will not attempt Mrs. Cowley's new play, *The World as It Goes*, because of the way they have been treated by the critic. The author of the criticism in the *Gazetteer*, then, was Cowley; but how long he had been writing for that paper we can only judge by the quality of the writing. And nothing more can be found out about his life: the *Biographia Dramatica* (1782) merely says of him, "a person who enjoys a place in the stamp-office, and who is supposed to employ himself as a writer in some of the news-papers." He later became a captain in the East India Company service and died in 1797. Among the critiques which he probably wrote for the *Gazetteer* are first-night reviews of the *School for Scandal*, May 10, 1777, and of *The Critic*, November 1, 1779. The first was a guarded piece of general praise for the play and of comment on the central object of satire and on the device of contrast between two main charac-

ters, but it attempted no detailed criticism. The second showed less admiration for the author's genius and took up in detail some of the objects of the burlesque and defended them or pointed out what had been omitted. Whereas many critics of the century found *The Merry Wives of Windsor* one of Shakespeare's best comedies, this critic observed that the conduct of the Falstaff of this play was "inconsistent with that keenness of wit, and depth of observation, which distinguishes this admirable character in Harry the Fourth."<sup>17</sup> When Charles Dibdin took a gentle sentimental tale from Marmontel and made one of his comic operas, full of farce and vulgar language and music, Cowley wrote a long review to point out the absurdities and irregularities in the result.<sup>18</sup> He was also very much interested in the acting of Shakespeare. He wrote careful criticism of and advice to the actors who played *Henry VIII*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Othello*, and his remarks show a real understanding of Shakespeare and a fine feeling for subtleties of stage characterization.<sup>19</sup>

The *London Evening Post* in 1770 was printing two kinds of notices of new plays; one, the "account" identical with those published by other papers, and the other, a short paragraph of independent comment, not very significant or interesting comment, but at least not mere puffs. In 1771 this newspaper reprinted "The Theatrical Review" from the *Public Ledger*, from September 24-26 to October 19-22; and after that published a few notes of "theatrical intelligence." For the rest of the decade nothing of interest appears; we find merely the common "accounts" of new plays, sent out from some source near the theatre.

*Bingley's Journal, or the Universal Gazette, A Weekly Political and Commercial Paper*, has been examined from 1770 to 1773. In its fourth number, June 30, 1770, the leading article is an account of Samuel Foote's *Lame Lover*, a summary of the

<sup>17</sup> *Gazetteer*, September 18, 1778.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, January 19, 1780: review of *The Shepherdess of the Alps*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, October 31, February 17, and November 11, 1780, respectively.

plot and some comment on the details which had been most admired. On September 29 and October 6 were published two letters "for Bingley's Journal" signed "Ferrula," which attacked Garrick very violently as manager, first for his continuance of the spectacle of the *Jubilee*, and second for his promotion of the plays of Hugh Kelly in return for Kelly's favorable criticisms in the *Public Ledger*. During the rest of the file, however, we find merely the conventional "accounts" of new plays—and the curious thing is that they sound very much like emanations from the office of the manager of Drury Lane Theatre.

The files of the *London Packet*, or *New Lloyd's Evening Post* are too imperfect to allow a complete survey of the theatrical criticism for this period. Garrick and Colman held stock in the paper. It is alleged by a writer to the *Morning Chronicle*, October 30, 1772, that Garrick had written the "News from the Theatres" in the *Packet* a few days before, in which his own farce, *The Irish Widow*, had been praised. We know, however, that William Woodfall, whom we shall meet later as the most important theatrical critic of his day, was the publisher or editor of this paper after the issue of April 30-May 3, 1773, for an announcement to that effect was made in the paper itself. As this was shortly after his unsuccessful attempt in Scotland to be an actor, and as we have abundant evidence of his interest in things theatrical, it is hard not to believe that he wrote what criticism appeared in the *Packet*. He may even have been writing for the paper before it was transferred to him.<sup>20</sup> During 1772 the *Packet* had published occasional paragraphs of theatrical news, with some few critical comments. In 1773 it was customary to print "accounts" of new plays, paragraphs of theatrical news, and some comments. For example, one issue contained a letter condemning sentimental comedy; the next an "account" of *She Stoops to Conquer*; the next, a letter praising Goldsmith;

<sup>20</sup> It is said by the *Dictionary of National Biography* that he edited the paper from 1772 to 1774.

and the next, a letter defending him against the (*General?*) *Evening Post* critic. After Woodfall took over the paper the "Theatrical Articles" became fairly frequent, and occasionally became somewhat longer reviews. The paper also contained much correspondence about the current theatrical squabbles. In 1776 the *Packet*, if we may judge from so few numbers as we have seen, ran a commonplace paragraph of "Theatrical Intelligence." The next year there is evidence that its critiques were being copied from morning papers. From 1778 to 1780, the paragraphs became more numerous. In the issue for November 17-19, 1779, a letter to the printer complained of the conflicting opinions which were to be found in the newspapers about the revived tragedy, *The Duke of Milan* by Philip Massinger. The correspondent voiced a wish that has been breathed many a time by one who has searched the early newspapers for theatrical criticism: ". . . but were there one who loves the theatre, possessed of a competent knowledge of our drama, and a moderate portion of literary taste; one who feels and judges for himself . . .!"

The *Public Advertiser* continued to be content with publishing daily the playbills and a few occasional notes of "theatrical intelligence." By 1778 it was publishing long "puffs" of a few new plays. The next year, however, the reviews of new plays appeared to be attempts at more fair criticism. On November 1, 1779, there was published an interesting review of *The Critic*.

In the files of the *Craftsman, or Say's Weekly Journal*, 1771-76, the *General Advertiser*, 1778-79, the *London Courant*, 1779-80, and the *Middlesex Journal*, 1769-76, there are the "accounts" and some notes of "theatrical intelligence," but nothing of any importance as criticism, unless we look a little more closely at the *Middlesex Journal*. From practically no notices of the theatre in 1770-72, there is a change to regular short paragraphs of "theatrical intelligence" in 1774; and during that year the articles grow longer and even more dull and more scarce. In 1775 it is to be observed that there are many copies from other

papers, but in the fall some independent and interesting longer reviews appear; for example, an excellent appreciation of Congreve's *Way of the World*, October 7-10, 1775, and an unsympathetic review of *Cato* and of Thomas Sheridan's performance of it. In 1776 the reviews are mostly copied from other papers

*Lloyd's Evening Post*, which ran steadily through these years, contributes nothing to our study. A few paragraphs of "theatrical intelligence," reprints of "The Theatrical Review" from the *Public Ledger* in 1771, "accounts" of new plays with brief comment and a little news of the theatres in 1776 and 1777, reprints from the *Gazetteer* in 1778—these form the substance of the theatrical articles in *Lloyd's Evening Post*.

There is more to say of the *General Evening Post* during these years. Through 1770, it is true, there is nothing more in its columns than a number of articles reprinted from other newspapers and a few notes of news about performances. During the first week of 1771, however, the *General Evening Post* published the first three numbers of a series, "The Theatre," whose chief aim seemed to be to attack Garrick and Colman on the score of their writings, their productions, and their persons. The entertainments they had been offering the town were "trumpery and mummery"; yet when Garrick revived Elizabethan plays it was because he did not have to pay for benefit nights for the authors, not because he had any feeling for Shakespeare or the others. Reports of the theatres were carried under "Theatrical Intelligence." Memoirs of actors and actresses were printed under "Theatrical History." Beginning on September 24, 1771, this paper also reprinted from the *Public Ledger* many issues of "The Theatrical Review," as we said before. Alongside of these reprinted criticisms there were published paragraphs of "Theatrical Intelligence" which contain a good accumulation of critical material. But the largest mass of criticism is to be found in long letters from some very industrious correspondents who signed themselves "Longinus," "Jeremy Collier," "Lorenzo," "Crito,"

"Honestus," and the like pseudonyms. How many men took part in this interchange cannot be stated. The letters will be grouped together as the *General Evening Post's* contributions to critical literature. One of these correspondents, "Longinus," claims to have been the cause of the cessation of the reprinting of "The Theatrical Review"—the last essay from which appeared in the *Post* for November 29-30—and therefore says that he feels called upon to send in reviews of the new plays (*General Evening Post*, January 18-21, 1772). The mass of correspondence continues until the opening of the next season, September, 1772, when for several issues we find only brief "Theatrical Intelligence." With the issue of September 26-29, however, a new series of critical essays, called "Dramatic Strictures,"<sup>21</sup> commences; it continues until March 1, 1773. By the opening of the winter season of 1773-74 the *General Evening Post* was again publishing merely "Theatrical Intelligence" and the conventional "accounts" of new plays. Very little criticism is to be found thereafter, for the paragraphs are not much more than news reports, with brief judgments. In 1775 and from then on to 1779 the critical articles were usually reprinted from other newspapers. The critical writing of importance then is that which appeared between 1771 and 1773.

We must look first at the letters of "Longinus" and "Jeremy Collier" and the others. It seems to have been the judgments of "The Theatrical Review" which first called forth this correspondence. Both "Longinus" and "Jeremy Collier," during the month of December, 1771, begin their letters with a contradiction of some judgment of the writer of the "Review." Then in the paper for December 24-26, "Longinus" says that as the "Re-

<sup>21</sup> Baker's *Biographia Dramatica*, Edition of 1811, speaks of John Seally as the author of a work called *Dramatic Strictures*, as well as conductor of the *Universal Museum* and the *Freeholder's Magazine*; it also speaks of him as becoming "lazy gentleman, the author and dramatic censor." It is possible that this series of articles in the *General Evening Post* may have been Seally's work in its original form.

view" has been banished from the *General Evening Post*, he will no longer bother to direct his attacks against it. He continues to write long critical discussions. The first of these is an excellent criticism of the character of Hamlet; it is chiefly aimed at those people who try to interpret Hamlet as a paragon of virtue as prince, son, and lover, and it points out vividly how Hamlet fails to meet the ideal demands in all of these positions. Other letters show "Longinus" objecting to the slighting of modern authors in favor of the old comedy; he believes that the new moral play should be acclaimed above the Restoration comedy, and that audiences do not so acclaim it because of the genius of certain actors. He points out an error of the actors who in a tragedy fail to show any signs of distress or desire to assist when their lovers or relatives are lying wounded on the stage and who thus destroy the entire illusion. He approves of Hamlet's injunction to the players, but observes that the scene is dramatically impertinent, that Shakespeare makes "the necessary business of the play stand still to dazzle the auditor's imagination with the lustre of his critical accuracy." He proves *Timon of Athens* bad by reference to Aristotle, he exclaims against the absurdity and impropriety of the scene where Timon throws plates—what would Voltaire say! He is absurdly serious in his indictment of the character of Polly in *The Beggar's Opera*, for he says that by her passivity she becomes an accomplice in all her husband's crimes, and thus shows her true nature.<sup>22</sup>

"Jeremy Collier" at times sounds very much like "Longinus." He left off attacking "The Theatrical Review" at the same time and he frequently discussed the same topics just after "Longinus" had written. He too was concerned for the fate of modern authors and suggested that there be less praise for Shakespeare; especially would he censure Shakespeare's employment of preternatural characters, just as critics would censure a modern author

<sup>22</sup> See *General Evening Post*, December 31-January 2, 1772; January 4-7, January 9-11, 18-21, 28-30, February 6-8, 20-22, and elsewhere

who would venture to employ them. He believed however that the "Town" did not judge too severely, for such severe judgments served to stimulate genius. He carried over from comedy to tragedy the attack upon plainness or indecency of expression. • He thought *Volpone* founded upon a harsh, unnatural plan, crude in idea and odious in execution; and he proceeded with moral reflections to disprove Jonson's comment on human nature. He attacked *Timon of Athens* fiercely, not merely Cumberland's alteration of it but the fundamental idea of the play:

The two grand passions to be excited in tragedy are pity and terror; pity for the miseries of the worthy, and terror at the punishments inflicted upon guilt: neither of these passions however is excited in *Timon of Athens*; the hero, held out as an object of compassion, is an object only of ridicule; when he talks of his misfortunes, we actually smile at his follies, and see him so undistinguishing a prodigal that we no way detest the ingratitude of his parasites. . . . Thus in prosperity he is an idiot, in calamity he is a blasphemer; he behaves foolishly when surrounded by flatterers, and wickedly when abandoned. Yet in the midst of all his lunacy on the one hand, and all his impiety on the other, we are to commiserate his sufferings and to think that both men and Gods have treated him very dirtily.

There is a vigorous personality behind "Jeremy Collier's" writing, however narrow he may be in his aesthetic doctrines and in his taste.

After February 18, 1772, we frequently meet letters from a "Lorenzo" who ranks with the other two correspondents in the vigor of his criticisms. He is a champion of the moderns enough to attack the ancients in their very citadel, the tragedies of Sophocles and the chorus of those tragedies. He declares that Greek tragedy might be all very well for the Greeks, but that it simply would not be tolerated on the modern stage; and that is natural because each nation has its own taste. As for the chorus, it is obvious that the fundamental idea of that is not *natural* (or naturalistic) and therefore intolerable. "Lorenzo" is sharp with the actors for pronouncing "aches" as two syllables, as he finds them all doing; and with the actresses who take rustic rôles and

fail to speak rustically. He out-Rymers Rymer in his criticism of *Othello*: it is improper that Aemilia should be a servant of Desdemona, for Iago would not have allowed his wife to lower herself so; Roderigo is made out too big a fool and Cassio would not get drunk so abruptly; and Desdemona should not be permitted to speak after she is dead! To correct some of these faults, "Lorenzo" suggests that Aemilia might be made a friend on a visit, and Cassio's drunkenness might be related but not exhibited. His characterization of Richard III, however, gives us more confidence in "Lorenzo": he complains that Shakespeare made his villain so black a villain that an audience is forced into incredulity and thence into laughter at him; and he is not appreciative of an actor who brings out the grotesque humor of Richard as well as his wickedness. He complains of Shakespeare's characterization of Cloten in *Cymbeline*, as that of an incredible monster.

The fourth of the important correspondents was "Crito." We first find "Crito" concerning himself with details of acting; for example, he draws a very vivid picture of the ridiculous fop as he might be seen about London streets and urges an actor to costume and play the part of Jerry Sneak in *The Lying Valet* after that pattern. This advisory kind of criticism he does with tact and imagination. We find "Crito" also concerned about the historical accuracy of costumes for *Richard III*, in a day when not many men yet were decided on the matter. He also voices a wish that we might have a *Rehearsal* brought up to date to ridicule the modern tragedy—seven years before *The Critic* was written. Yet he looks upon *George Barnwell* as inferior to few plays in English, and very good for youths who have gone into trade; indeed, he voices a desire to see tragedy take hold of common life as its subject, and there again he was looking forward.

Then we come to the series of "Dramatic Strictures" which ran from September 26-29, 1772, to March 1, 1773. These articles were at first in the form of essays; for example, "On Imitation and Original Composition," "On Fletcher's *Rule a Wife and*

*Have a Wife*," "On the Importance of Fable in Drama." The writer combined the aims of a reporter with those of an author of serious, well-considered criticism of plays and of acting. Especially after January 23, 1773, the essays more openly became reports on current theatrical offerings. The critic holds to a point of view very much like that of "Longinus" whom we have considered above. He reveals many of his age's curious criticisms of Shakespeare: *Romeo and Juliet* has so much ridiculous nonsense in it that only a very perfect representation can make it pass muster; Shakespeare's historical plays are great achievements, but nothing much can be said for his comedies of love; there is not much pleasantry in the scenes of Dogberry, Verges, and the Watch; many of the plays are bettered by the alterations that have been made in them, *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Cymbeline*, and *Hamlet* as altered by Garrick; the gravediggers' scene in *Hamlet* is excellent in itself but is out of place in this tragedy; and so on. Withal he professed a great veneration for Shakespeare's genius. The critic approaches Jeremy Collier in his insistence upon the support of morality in drama; immorality cannot be overlooked because of the fine language or noble station of the character. He urges the playing of *George Barnwell* at holiday time for the moral effect upon the city youth. He is shocked by the immorality as well as silliness of Fletcher's *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*. He follows Dr. Johnson in pointing out, in opposition to the prevailing fashion in tragedy, that tragedy does not require a love story at its center, as witness *Lear* and *Julius Caesar* and others. He is a great admirer of Garrick's acting though he is not above finding fault now and then.

There are a great many more interesting discussions hidden away in the communications to the *General Evening Post* during these two or three years. Every issue contained one or more articles or letters; the paper was what was called in those days a prominent "theatrical paper." Yet it is difficult to bring all the writing together, since it seems to have been done by many corre-

spondents rather than by a regular critic employed by the newspaper.

The *Morning Chronicle* had begun its long and honorable career on June 28, 1769. The histories of journalism name as the editor William Woodfall, a member of a family famous in newspaper history. From about 1774, however, to 1789, Woodfall was certainly the editor. During his proprietorship the paper took the lead in reporting at length the Parliamentary Debates. Woodfall gained the name of "Memory Woodfall" through his reputed ability to listen to long debates and then write out from memory, unassisted by notes, verbatim reports of the speeches. He made it necessary for competing papers to send their reporters regularly to the Houses of Parliament. He also laid an emphasis upon the reporting of theatrical entertainments which caused it to take a more prominent place in the make-up of the newspapers. His style as a news writer approached at times the concise and pungent paragraph of modern journalists.<sup>23</sup> When he retired from the *Morning Chronicle* in 1789 to publish the *Diary* single-handed, James Perry became the editor and during the next twenty-five years raised the paper to first importance in the eyes of the public and drew to his support some of the most famous writers of the time: Sir James Mackintosh, R. B. Sheridan, Thomas Campbell, Thomas Moore, John Campbell, S. T. Coleridge, Charles Lamb, and William Hazlitt.<sup>24</sup> The aspect of its history which especially interests us at this time is the continuous reporting of the affairs of the theatres, the writings of three professional theatrical critics, William Woodfall, John Campbell who wrote the theatrical articles from 1800 to 1805, and who later became Lord Chief Justice of England, and William Hazlitt, who made his débüt as a journalist and critic on this paper.

Although it was William Woodfall who brought the theatrical

<sup>23</sup> Bourne, H. R. Fox. *English Newspapers*, 1887, Vol I, Chap VII.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Chap IX.

department of the *Morning Chronicle* into prominence, it is not clear whether he was the author of the paragraphs which appeared during the first few years of the paper's life. According to biographical accounts, he was with his father on the *Public Advertiser* about 1769, went to Scotland shortly afterwards to try his luck on the stage, married one of his fellow-troupers, returned to London in 1772, became editor of the *London Packet* from that year to 1774, and was then "called by the proprietors of 'The Morning Chronicle' to the double station of printer and editor."<sup>25</sup> Against the statements made in the standard accounts of newspaper history that he published the *Chronicle* from its commencement,<sup>26</sup> we have to set the fact that in 1773 the printer of the newspaper was Thomas Evans; for it was he whom Goldsmith attacked in retaliation for a letter which had been published in that paper.<sup>27</sup> Evans was also publisher at this time of the *London Packet*; hence Woodfall was already bound up with him in one enterprise as early as 1772.

Whoever may have been the author of them, theatrical criticisms begin to appear in the *Morning Chronicle* early in its career. In 1770 a series under the heading of "Theatrical Affairs" appears to have run its course. In the few issues of the paper for 1771 which are still extant, at least one excellent piece of theatrical criticism can be found, a review of Joseph Cradock's tragedy, *Zobeide*.<sup>28</sup> When the file begins to be complete after May 4, 1772, we find innumerable paragraphs from correspond-

<sup>25</sup> See *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1803, p. 792, or *Annual Register*, 1803, p. 514; and also *Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>26</sup> Andrews, A *History of British Journalism*, 1855, Vol. I, p. 194; Bourne, H. R. Fox. *English Newspapers*, 1887, Vol I, Chap. VII.

<sup>27</sup> Forster, John *Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith*, Book IV, Chap XVI. See also *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1803, p. 696 Wm. Kenrick, who was believed to be author of the letter was a part owner in the *Morning Chronicle* Bourne, *op. cit.*, Vol I, p. 206, note 4.

<sup>28</sup> December 16, 1771 (British Museum). Only three issues survive in the British Museum; only one for 1770.

ents carrying on a newspaper war over the character and powers of David Garrick. Writers of this kind of personal abuse were to be held up to scorn in the character of Snake in the *School for Scandal*. The *Morning Chronicle* at this time shows such scurilous publication at its height. Occasionally there appears an attempt at the review of a new play. After the opening of the season in September, 1772, the paragraphs of "Theatrical Intelligence" continue fairly regularly, for the discussion of new plays and of the recent performances of old plays. The critic appears to be striving to be impartial towards the offerings of the two theatres and the performances of rival actors. He can praise actors for doing a good job with a poor play; he can be kindly towards a new and promising actress, but he can turn on a more familiar one—"Mrs. Vincent—Heaven bless the woman, and secure her a comfortable retreat where she may whine at leisure!"—"Whether Mrs. Gardner . . . had dropped her petticoats before the play began, we know not; but however strange it may appear, whenever she came on we could not help thinking of the carved figure of a woman at the head of a Dutch vessel newly painted"—he recognizes the preëminence of Garrick in the part of Benedick. He is pretty harsh upon the English farces, comic operas, and pantomimes which made up so large a part of the new drama of the time: he calls Garrick's comedy, *The Irish Widow*, "a piece pregnant with absurdity, founded on a plot equally improbable and egregious; fraught with language that would disgrace a brothel"; *The Rose*, Dr. Arne, is called "one of those weakly, unseasonable dramatic flowers, which blow every winter, but are immediately killed by the critical severity of the weather" and "a nutshell of nonsense"; *Cross Purposes*, a farce from a French source, "is, however, entirely cooked up in the English taste, and taking it in a general point of view, it may not unaptly be termed a plate of hashed mutton rendered tolerably savory by the assistance of the most common pickles." Elizabethan plays do not please him without alterations; he accepts

gladly the alterations which Garrick made in Shirley's *The Gamester*. He is inclined to pity those who do not appreciate at least the dignity and grace of a tragedy done in the Greek manner, like William Mason's *Elfrida*, though he is somewhat conscious of being the devil's advocate here: he supposes that such a play "is languid on the theatre and unpleasant to the million" and then he turns his sarcasm on the "million" and others:

. . . the multitude will naturally forget that they are to suppose themselves Grecian auditors, or partakers of a literary feast, but will, in spite of the judicious preparatory advertisement prefixed to the printed copy of the choruses, look for the agreeable absurdity of Cumberland, the common-place jests of David Garrick, the perpetual harlequinade of Centlivre, the laugh-creating wit of Wycherley, the unnatural pathos of Murphy, or the catch-clap sentiment of modern play-writers in general.

He had enough catholicity of taste to claim that every species of the drama deserves approbation, if it be well done. In a long review, such as that of John Home's *Alonzo* (March 1, 1773), this critic shows both sense and some sense of humor, a friendly and appreciative attitude, severity towards obvious ineptitude, and some gift of expression, though his writing is still slow and painfully methodical.

Through 1773 and 1774, then, there appear in the *Morning Chronicle* frequent paragraphs of "Theatrical Intelligence," written by some one who is careful, studious, impartial, sensible, but not at all brilliant. Also in the columns are to be found innumerable letters from correspondents dealing with the controversial matters which rose in the theatrical world: William Kenrick's quarrel with Garrick, the discussion over George Colman's management of Covent Garden Theatre, comparisons between the Macbeths of Garrick and Macklin, and others. The editor allowed letters to be printed on both sides of any controversy; the paper became a kind of open forum for public discussions. Woodfall makes an editor's declaration of impartiality in a letter to Garrick, November 16, 1773:

I am aware I am not bound to account to you, or any other theatrical hero, for my conduct as a printer. But as I professedly print a free, unshackled theatrical paper, and am thought to hold a literary cat-o'-nine-tails to flagellate the back of every stage-offender, I will not rest for a moment under the suspicion of acting partially in a theatrical newspaper squabble. The immortal Roscius and every actor under him shall find I will on all occasions give fair play to public combatants.<sup>29</sup>

This may refer to Woodfall's conduct of the *London Packet* or of the *Morning Chronicle*; but two letters to Garrick in February, 1776, make the same strong declaration as to the policy of the *Chronicle*:

You cannot, Mr. Garrick, but know that, as the printer of the Morning Chronicle, I am the servant of the public—their message carrier—their mouth-piece . . .

And Woodfall defends his willingness to allow a letter of denunciation of Garrick's party in a dispute to be printed, by saying:

I acted against you, not as Mr. Woodfall, who honours and respects you, but as the printer of the Morning Chronicle, who ought to know, to hear, to see—not through his own organs, but those of his correspondents. . . . It was not the object, what Mr. Woodfall would wish to print against his friend Mr. Garrick, but how far the editor of the Morning Chronicle found it absolutely necessary to go to save his character for theatrical impartiality—a character, by the by, which is the very basis of the paper<sup>30</sup>

Through the season of 1774-75 the *Morning Chronicle* reported regularly the affairs of the theatre. The articles were approaching the essay form and were getting away from the set jargon of theatrical reports and criticism. We may be fairly certain that by this time William Woodfall himself is writing the theatrical criticism. We shall discuss the characteristics of his writing when we have completed a survey of the files of the newspaper.<sup>31</sup> While his criticisms continue through the next few years, other series of articles rise and fall. On October 3, 1775,

<sup>29</sup> Boaden, J. *Private Correspondence of David Garrick*, Vol. I, p. 583  
<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 135-38. <sup>31</sup> See Chap. VI.

appears Number I of "The Scenic Spectator, by Lemuel Launce, Esq. (To be continued occasionally)," a specimen of whose style may be seen in the opening greeting to the public:

Hail, Winter! season of delight, criticism, and the scenes, all hail! The doors of the theatre again unfold, and the dramatic wheel is once more in motion, Mr Woodfall: lucky circumstance to all the soft vacuities of life; to the luxurious literary and idle: lucky to the fair and to the fortunate; but in a particular manner lucky to *me*, for I have leisure, money, and a pleasing propensity to indulge the critical Cacoethes

The eloquent Lemuel then promises to write about all theatrical matters. Five numbers of "The Scenic Spectator" are published, the last appearing on October 19. They deal with such matters as the conduct of the managers, attacking particularly Harris of Covent Garden, and the system of puffing. The following season a new series appears, "The Scene Shifter. A New Occasional Paper for the Morning Chronicle, By William Whisper, One of His Majesty's Servants," No. I, September 20, 1776. "William Whisper" declares that he will try to keep the actors and managers to their duty, out of a voluntary desire to promote the public good, not because he is in the pay of any one. What he deals in, however, is gossip and personalities of the green-room. Four numbers only of "The Scene Shifter" are published (September 20, 27, October 7, and 24). On December 14, 1776, a single number of a proposed new series is published: "The Thespian Oracle: or Dramatic and Theatrical Committee. A new occasional Paper." The plan was to sit in judgment on all important events in the theatre and communicate the "resolutions" or "verdicts" of the "Committee" to the public through the medium of the *Morning Chronicle*. The plan was not carried out, but the very form of it suggests the judicial attitude towards criticism which was so common in the century. Another series of paragraphs, signed "The Mouse in the Green-room," commenced some time in 1776 and continued until 1777 when it was apparently unable to resist the attacks upon it in the *Morning*

*Post.* It is merely a series of paragraphs of gossip about actors and managers, meant to damage reputations and cause sensations. A letter from Garrick to Woodfall, February 2, 1777, suggests some cabal which included them both and perhaps a third person in this underground venture:

You must really take care that our Friend is not suspected of the M—— Thompson if he can will be rude with C—— or me—his rudeness I would chuse to have—but letting the Cat (M Joncan [here the MS is not legible]) out of y<sup>e</sup> bag—w<sup>d</sup> be y<sup>e</sup> Devil: I promis'd that I would speak to you for him that he may still be conceal'd—I laugh at him—but he is too foolish upon y<sup>e</sup> Occasion <sup>32</sup>

At times in the same paper there appear articles of the same sort signed "The Cricket of Covent Garden." In 1778 another short-lived series began and continued to Number X (October 26 to December 4): these were signed "X" and dealt with problems of the patents of the theatres, managements, condition of the players, powers of the patentees, rights of the audiences, and so forth. None of these short-lived series usurp the place of Woodfall's more seriously written theatrical reviews and essays, and none of them offer any critical literature worth considering.

The other new paper of importance was the *Morning Post*. The first number of this paper appeared in November, 1772. It took almost immediately an important place among the daily journals, and especially so in the business of theatrical criticism. Though the files of this paper are unfortunately incomplete, it appears that by April 17, 1773 (No. 144), a long series of "Theatrical Critiques" had been published, and another only slightly shorter, "The Stage." In this issue are found No. XXXII in the series "Theatrical Critique," a review of *The Albion Queens*, signed "B——," and No. XIX of "The Stage," a letter signed "Scorpion" in wicked, slashing style attacking the conduct of Mrs. Yates in her dispute with George Colman. It is to be supposed that these two departments of the *Morning Post*

<sup>32</sup> Baker, George P. *Some Unpublished Correspondence of David Garrick*, 1907, pp. 83-87.

were continued at intervals through 1773: for on January 19 and 20, 1774, were published Nos. XL and XLI of "The Stage," and on January 31 a "Theatrical Critique," not numbered but written in the same violent manner as the earlier critiques. We find traces of much correspondence dealing with theatrical disputes during these years, even vigorous replies from correspondents who disliked the judgments of the *Post's* critic. When we come to the complete files of 1775 we find "Theatrical Intelligence," signed often "S \* \* \* \* \* \* \*" (Scorpion ?), which included a good deal of stage gossip; we find also "The Stage," which dealt with the abilities of actors and actresses; and we find further numbers (January 18, No. LIV) of "Theatrical Critique," also signed "Scorpion." While there is some scurrility in the articles about persons, the critiques of new plays usually contain merely the incidents of the plot and a few unimportant observations. The writer or writers seem to have a preference for the work of Garrick and Drury Lane. When George Colman's *Man of Business* was produced on January 29, 1774, the activities of the *Morning Post* had so far made an impression that the chief object of attack in the Prologue to the play was that newspaper. The *Post*, in return, in its review on January 31, called the play the "most absurd jumble of ill-selected plagiarisms and original lumber." Two correspondents of David Garrick believed that he himself used the paper for carrying on his battles; but it must be remembered that it would be scarcely possible, humanly speaking, for Garrick to have been author of all criticisms which offended actors laid at his door during his ascendancy.<sup>38</sup> After his retirement in 1776, however, we know that he wrote some of the theatrical news in the *Morning Post*. He was the author of a

<sup>38</sup> Boaden, James *Private Correspondence of David Garrick*, Vol. II, p 108 Mrs Abington to Garrick "She is willing to act in any plays that are ready, and can be creditably performed if the plays are *not* ready, and that Mr Garrick has no occasion for Mrs Abington, she repeats the request made last year, that he will give her up her agreement, and not make 'The Morning Post' the vehicle of his resentment." *Ibid*, Vol II, p 207, Isaac

series of articles signed "The Prompter before the Curtain," beginning November 18, 1776, and continuing irregularly until March 6, 1777.<sup>34</sup> On December 14, 1776, began a series of letters entitled "*Theatres du Paris*"; the five letters, the last appearing on December 31, discuss opera and French comedy, plays produced some time before in the theatres of Paris, Noverre's ballets, and Dorat's play *Le malheureux imaginaire*. As there is nothing in these letters which could not have been written by a man in London who had made a visit to Paris a month or two earlier, it is quite possible that Garrick, who was familiar with the theatrical affairs of Paris, wrote them, and that it was for one of them that the editor of the *Morning Post* wrote to thank Garrick on December 25, 1776<sup>35</sup> Two letters signed "The Ghost of Gay," December 24 and 28, 1776—the first condemning musical pieces and stupid farces and the second discussing very interestingly the differences between pure comedy and the sentimental—might also be the work of Garrick. Along with these special articles there appeared regularly in the newspaper the paragraphs of "Theatrical Intelligence." When new plays were brought on,

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Bickerstaffe, March 18, 1777, accuses Garrick of aiding Kenrick and others in driving Bickerstaffe out of employment and out of England, by writing letters against him in the papers, especially in the *Morning Post*. *Ibid.*, II, 117.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, I, lxx.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 197. H Bate to Garrick: "I have this instant received your entertaining and most kind favour. This is an instance of friendship beyond what I could possibly have expected even from so warm a friend as I have ever found you. As to the salary for your labours, we must defer entering upon that subject till your wants require it or my fortune will enable me to do justice to your merit and services, neither of which seems very likely at present, and therefore you must content yourself, as is your custom, with doing good to others—for the very sake of doing good alone! I admire the intelligence exceedingly; it abounds with that singular spirit of narration that interests while it entertains the readers. But, my dear friend, do not let your friendship for me, or your zeal for the poor Morning Post, betray you into a situation that is likely to endanger your health."

the *Morning Post* gave each careful attention; a long summary of the plot was printed, then detailed and thoughtful criticism. For the current performances of old stock pieces the paper had briefer paragraphs of comment. Almost every day through 1777 something about the theatres appeared. Early in 1778 this series began to fall off, and only new plays were given space; and even the new plays were reviewed in a rather perfunctory style. An intermittent series of articles, "Theatre and Journal de Paris," began on August 3 and continued through the year. On October 2, also, a correspondent, "Trim," offered to send in letters on the theatre at intervals, and accompanied the offer with the first of the letters, "The Theatre, No. I." "The Theatre" ran only to No. V, October 22, but long enough to give an excellent comparison between the characters of Ford in the *Merry Wives of Windsor* and Kitely in *Every Man in His Humour*, as well as some interesting descriptions of the acting of Henderson. Until 1780 the *Morning Post* continued to be edited by the Reverend Henry Bate and to publish regular paragraphs of "Theatrical Intelligence" which were doubtless written by the editor.

Henry Bate was a colorful personage who had gained the nickname of "The Fighting Parson" through a brawl which took place in Vauxhall in 1773 in consequence of some journalistic escapade of his. He had been born in 1745, educated (according to rumor, but not to record) at Queen's College, Oxford, ordained and made rector of North Farmbridge in Essex. Retired life in the country had not been to the taste of Parson Bate, however, and he was to be found most of the time in London living a life of pleasure. He was a man of quick temper and caustic tongue. After he turned his hand to journalism, his writings brought upon him duels and suits for libel. He became one of the editors of the *Morning Post* from its very beginning in 1772 and continued in that position until he quarreled with the proprietor in 1780 and set up a rival paper on his own account, the *Morning Herald*. He also started the *Courier de l'Europe* and the *English Chroni-*

cle (1786). He had a long and not too creditable career as a parson and as a magistrate of seven English and four Irish counties. He married a sister of Mrs. Hartley, the actress, in 1780. In 1784 he took the name of Dudley in compliance with the will of a relation of that name. In 1713 he was created a baronet. After a long and proper old age he died in 1824.<sup>36</sup>

The notoriety which came to Parson Bate did not come all unsought. When in 1776 a rival publisher tried to steal the name and reputation of the *Morning Post* by setting up the *New Morning Post*, Bate resorted to advertising of a very modern sort. Horace Walpole tells of seeing a gorgeous procession in Piccadilly, which he discovered to have been "set forth by Mr. Bate, Lord Lyttelton's chaplain, the author of the old *Morning Post*, and meant as an appeal to the town against his antagonist, the new one. I did not perceive it, but the musicians had masks; on their caps was written the *Morning Post*, and they distributed handbills."<sup>37</sup> Walpole was later more explicit upon the character of Bate, when the latter was brought up for libel on the Duke of Richmond. In a letter to the Countess of Upper Ossory, June 1, 1780, he said, "Mr. Bates (*sic*) had rather lie than speak truth; and for fear he should even be suspected of veracity, he has chosen the Duke of Richmond for the hero of his abuse."<sup>38</sup> Bate by no means confined himself to writing about general principles either in his political writings or in his theatrical criticisms. He went on to attack the personal conduct of private individuals and through these attacks got himself into trouble continually. His methods gained him wealth, but no good name among people of honorable principles. He was a topic for discussion after dinner upon an occasion when Samuel Johnson and James Boswell were guests at the home in Iffley, near Oxford, of Dr. Nowell, principal of St. Mary Hall. Boswell says:

<sup>36</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*. "Henry Bate Dudley."

<sup>37</sup> *Letters of Horace Walpole* (Ed. Paget Toynbee), Vol. IX, pp. 439-40.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, XI, 185.

We talked of a certain clergyman of extraordinary character, who by exerting his talents in writing on temporary topics, and displaying uncommon intrepidity, has raised himself to affluence. I maintained that we ought not to be indignant at his success; for merit of every sort was entitled to reward. JOHNSON. "Sir. what he has is rather the contrary; I will, indeed, allow him courage, and on this account we so far give him credit. We have more respect for a man who robs boldly on the highway, than for a fellow who jumps out of a ditch and knocks you down behind your back. Courage is a quality so necessary for maintaining virtue, that it is always respected, even when it is associated with vice "<sup>39</sup>

Bate's criticism in the *Morning Post* showed at first a slashing, scurrilous style, full of personal abuse and innuendo. It was doubtless he who signed himself "Scorpion,"<sup>40</sup> and sometimes spoke of "stinging to death" pieces which did not please him on the stage. He included in his attack by burlesque the writings of other newspaper critics. On the other hand he was willing to print, or his publisher was, answers to his attacks. Some years the paper contained almost no discussion of the theatre except bits of gossip from the greenroom. As time went on the critiques became more stereotyped in form and content: a few news notes, a few judgments, and only a very few passages of description which let us see what was going on. Even the slashing style of the first year became calmer and duller. But at times when a new play appeared or an old one was revived or a new performer played an old rôle, the critic wrote more fully and with the marks of a man of intelligence and taste. He despised the hollow, roaring type of tragic acting and tragic writing: hence when *The Critic* was played he applauded the burlesque heartily. He was, however, quick to see the promise in Mrs. Siddons. He hated "soaring on sentimentals" and railed vigorously at the repentance scene which was sometimes tacked onto the end of *The Beggar's Opera*:

<sup>39</sup> Boswell, James. *Life of Samuel Johnson, LLD.* Ed. by H. Morley, London, 1891, Vol. IV, p 230

<sup>40</sup> See above, pp 226-7.

This scene is introduced after Macheath has taken leave of Lucy and bids the keeper to tell the Sheriff's officers he is ready—The curtain dropping, the Poet and Manager come on, after haranguing on the strict poetical justice required in the piece, agree, that “*virtue is better than house and land*”—and that man who “*violates the laws of his country is an enemy to society*”—and a variety of such like sentimental nonsense. The Manager then, after paying a compliment to the *blind bench* at Bow Street, starts the idea of *ballast-heaving*, which is agreed to by the Poet, when the scene changes and by the rule of *presto! presto!* we are instantly conveyed to Woolwich Warren, where we see the “*Justitia*,” and the other convicts’ hulk riding at anchor, in a very beautiful perspective view. Hither Macheath is now brought in a shabby blue waist-coat, attended by his fettered companions. Polly and Lucy come down from London *without their hats*, to pay their compliments to him. The former loves him in adversity, the other upbraids him and marches off. Macheath now sings two or three airs about the pick-axes, shovels, and brushes, which are now to annoy his *lily-hands*, when a gleam of hope shoots across him and he tells his Polly that when he has served his time out, they shall be happy for that

“The wretched to-day shall be virtuous to-morrow,” which being re-echoed by the surrounding gaol-birds, in full chorus, concludes the piece

*Folly*, in her most extravagant moments, never before devised so absurd an idea, as the addition we are now speaking of—nor did Dullness ever so effectually lend a helping hand to compleat a miserable design.<sup>41</sup>

Likewise he was led to praise *The School for Scandal* as a return to the sense and wit and style of Congreve; he was aware that it was something better than the stage had seen for more than a generation. He was not in sympathy, however, with the comedy of Ben Jonson; he was indeed independent enough to contradict the well-known dictum of Dryden that *The Silent Woman* was the best English comedy. Bate found the fable “trifling, broken, and confused,” and the characters too unnatural to please him. He praised the classical quality of Jonson’s language, but pointed out that whereas Jonson went to the

<sup>41</sup> *Morning Post*, October 18, 1777.

classics for his materials, Shakespeare went to "Nature." He endeavored to appraise the rising musical drama and farcical after-pieces according to their own intentions. He was sympathetic towards new performers and had a theory of acting which made him a good judge, and a good teacher—and this latter he attempted frequently to be.

Bate did his best work while writing for the *Morning Post*. We shall glance at his work on the *Morning Herald* when we come to study that paper. He may be remembered as one of the first professional theatrical critics who has left a considerable body of critical writing, not without merit andreadableness.

David Garrick's writings as "The Promter before the Curtain" are not important as criticism and need not detain us long. His opening paper (November 18, 1776) says that as the other critics seem to be "influenced" it appears to be high time that a calm and impartial spectator step in; the actors and actresses have become so capricious through overindulgence in their whims by the lenient Garrick that it is not possible to predict what play will be played, regardless of what the play-bills have said; hence the theatres have got into bad repute with their patrons; "The Promter before the Curtain" intends to speak out about particular offenders, but intends to be impartial. In the later papers he criticizes the actresses for giving so few performances that the public loses curiosity about them; he criticizes all the players for not working harder at their parts and not getting up new plays and new parts; he prophesies the invasion of the English stage by French actors; he tells of the "good old days" when the actors did work hard for the entertainment of the public; he praises an occasional player who at present takes his profession seriously. When he introduces a substitute, the "Deputy Promter," January 31, 1777, the essays in his department deal with such literary subjects as "The Character of Shakespeare's Genius" and "Dramatic Sketches" of the lives of the older dramatists. There is no fresh criticism of current plays.

The success of the *Morning Post* encouraged a rival printer to try to steal both its name and its reputation. In November, 1776, appeared the *New Morning Post, or General Advertiser*, which continued until the end of the year, but did not succeed in its piratical attempt. It was against this upstart that the Reverend Henry Bate organized the procession which Horace Walpole saw from his window one day. The *New Morning Post* devoted a good deal of space to news of the theatres. A series of notes about theatrical arrangements, not about plays, "The Playhouse Spy," ran for several numbers. On November 20, "The Stage Gazette by Christopher Promptwell" commenced; in this "Gazette" appeared reviews of a revival of Congreve's *Old Bachelor* (November 23), and of a new cast in *Macbeth* (November 27). Three numbers of "The French Theatre," with news of Paris productions, were published (November 25, December 2 and 10), and three numbers of "The Theatrical Review" (December 4, 6, and 14). In the "Reviews" may be found some lengthy discussion of Greek tragedy with an attempt to persuade the town to look with favor upon William Mason's tragedy, *Caractacus*. The newspaper did not carry on long enough to contribute any large amount of criticism. It is clear, however, that a new morning paper in these days could not omit from its columns a section dealing with the season's offerings in the theatres.

Among the magazines which offer us materials for the study of theatrical criticism in this period the *London Magazine* is the most interesting. We have already noticed<sup>42</sup> the commencement of a series of articles called "The British Theatre" in this magazine which extended halfway through the decade of the seventies. Reviews of new plays continue to be careful studies, from a somewhat sentimental angle. The reviewer can stomach such a tragedy as Hugh Kelly's *Clementina* (March, 1771). "Pleasing instruction" is the criterion, and the "rules" are brought to bear

<sup>42</sup> See above, pp 177-80.

with mechanical precision. In accordance with his avowed dislike of the morals of the Restoration comedy, letters from correspondents are admitted which attack the characters in *The Provoked Wife* and deplore the bad influence of *The Beggar's Opera*. The lack of good drama is declared to be owing to the public and the managers, especially to the desire of Garrick and Colman to advance their sycophants. The reviewer, in spite of a general tendency to write pedantically and judge by mechanical rules, appreciates spontaneous humor and farce. When he gets an idea, furthermore, he has the power to speak vigorously. But as the years go on the comments become more brief and perfunctory. The paragraph of comment on *She Stoops to Conquer*, after the story has been given in full detail, is characteristic of the criticism (March, 1773):

This comedy is not ill calculated to give pleasure in the representation; but when we regard it with a critical eye, we find it to abound with numerous inaccuracies. The fable (a fault too peculiar to the hasty productions of the modern Comic Muse) is twisted into incidents not naturally arising from the subject, in order to *make things meet*; and consistency is repeatedly violated for the sake of humour. But perhaps we ought to sign a general pardon to the author, for taking the field against that monster called Sentimental Comedy, to oppose which his comedy was avowedly written. Indeed, the attempt was bold, considering the strength of the enemy; and we are glad to observe that our author still keeps the field with flying colours.—But (metaphor apart), it appears that the Doctor was too ardent. Well considering that the public were long accustomed to cry, he resolved to make them laugh at any rate. In aiming at this point, he seems to have stepped too far; and in lieu of comedy he has sometimes presented us with farce.

These redundancies are certainly the chief blots in his play. A stricter consistency in the fable, and a better attention to the unity of time in particular, would have exalted the comedy to a good and just reputation.

In February, 1775, however, his remarks on *The Rivals* are quite negligible; for example, they amount to merely such judgments as the following:

The dialogue in many scenes was natural and pleasing; in one or two, far superior to that of the modern race of comic writers.

There seems to have been a change of critic on the *London Magazine* about 1776. Once more plays begin to be dissected almost line by line; much space is given to each new play, whether a trifling thing or not. In a paper on the state of the theatre in general (October, 1776), the reviewer attacks also the conditions among the organs of theatrical criticism in the town:

Our business is to speak of the stage as it is, not directly as it should be; to point out the numerous corruptions it has admitted; the degeneracy of taste and degeneracy of manners they have been productive of; and, as the *source* of all, to animadvert upon the intrigue, folly, and avarice of managers, the unparalleled effrontery and unexampled confidence of authors, the stupid insolence and impudence too of players, and, to close the motley procession, the dullness, partiality, and prostitution of the whole tribe of news-paper critics. May we not add with justice, the selfish, servile conduct of news-printers in general, who conspire with the managers to stifle all sorts of theatrical discussion, which may in the most remote degree tend to the exposure of the pride, weakness and insolence of their masters and partners?

After attacking the managers and the players, he goes on:

The news-paper *critics* are another great cause of the degeneracy of the stage, for as the established morning papers are connected with the managers, this insect tribe are connected with the players, and now and then they have the honour of being noticed by the managers themselves.—These hyper-critics are composed of three descriptions of men.—We do not mean to speak of particular exceptions—the managers, their flatterers, friendly acquaintance and a few independent persons—Editors of papers, persons connected with the second-rate performers; and scribblers looking for favours, or for a dinner, from every person concerned or connected with the theatres, from the managers down to the lowest frequenters of Jupp's, these are the authors of the theatrical critiques or criticisms. The first in general will surely *praise* the managers and *abuse* the deserving performers; and if the independents were capable of giving an able judgment, the news-paper printers would refuse their productions. The second class never tell truth, because they are bribed

by orders, dinners, &c to stifle it, to abuse all young performers, and daub their benefactors. And the last class, the most despicable of all, setting up without *capital* depend for all their information on the understrappers of both houses, and of course, misrepresent, abuse, extol, and blunder without end, and without mercy they become the very echo of the noise, nonsense, envy, rancour, and scurrility, which they nightly hear, and thus ignorance is transmuted into vice, and mere hunger is undesignedly made the pandar of malignity.

Whatever the justice of such a tirade, this critic certainly gives the impression in his own criticisms that he is speaking impartially from his own sincere experiences in the theatres. For a little more than a year we can trace his hand in the *London Magazine*. His bitterness, even ferocity, towards the managers crops up occasionally. While paeans of praise were being sung about Garrick's acting during the spring of 1776 as Garrick played his popular parts for the last time and withdrew from the stage, this critic dared to write that he felt a falling-off in the great "Roscius's" art. He was full of praise, however, for Garrick's Richard III. He seemed to take pleasure in disagreeing with the other critics of the day, as he did in the judgment of *All the World's a Stage*, and, more significantly, of *A Trip to Scarborough*. In March, 1777, he wrote vigorously in defense of Vanbrugh's play, *The Relapse*, which Sheridan had altered into *A Trip to Scarborough*; he scoffed at the critics of the day who objected to the vulgarisms and coarseness in Vanbrugh; he thus took a very different attitude towards the Restoration comedy from that of his predecessor on the *London Magazine* who had inclined towards prudishness. *The School for Scandal* brought from him (May, 1777) a very long review, proportioned to what he considered at once the importance of the event—"a phenomenon in the theatrical world . . . a modern comedy, unaided by the deceptions of scenery, or the absurdities of sing-song and pantomime." The critic saw immediately that this was a work of genius; he went into the structure, the characters, the satirical intention, the dialogue, and the moral implications of the

comedy; and he closed with a warning against the morality of Charles Surface, "the good-hearted rake." When John Gay's prohibited opera, *Polly*, was produced, this critic called it unsuitable for the modern stage, because of its "sing-song absurdity" and its heavy dialogue. Obviously he had not a taste for opera. He was a good critic of acting; he discussed the actors' interpretations with sympathy and intelligence. But he appears not to have written after the summer of 1777. After that time the reviews in the *London Magazine* fall off in length and in quality, until they become quite negligible as criticism. When in July, 1783, the first number of the *London Magazine (Enlarged and Improved)* appeared, the editors promised a section called "The English Theatre and Register of Public Entertainments":

After our Literary Review, we shall give a summary account of the state of the theatres. In this department will be given a short account of every new theatrical performance, with the prologue, epilogue, songs and other appendages, interspersed with occasional strictures on the merits of the managers and performers

But we find in this department chiefly stage gossip and chronicle of events; and the criticism of new plays is deferred until they are published and can be taken up in the "Literary Review."

The *Town and Country Magazine* had commenced in 1769 and continued through the period we are now studying. From its opening number in January of that year until the end of 1789 the magazine published in every issue a section called "The British Theatre." The section was usually filled with news of the theatres, the "fables" of new plays, a few comments on the plays and on the actors, and occasional discussions of the merits of the actors and actresses of the two theatres. Some of the characteristics of the writing in this magazine during those twenty years may be given. A typical comment on a new play is this on Hugh Kelly's *A Word to the Wise*:

This piece was replete with sentiment and morality; but seemed defective in incident and character, and possessed but a small share of the *vis comica*.

The "fables" were given elaborately. The "news" merely announced who played what parts. Sometimes various contradictory criticisms from the other periodicals were summarized before a decision was made. In general the critic seemed to be erring on the side of caution. He objected to alterations of Shakespeare on principle; but he seemed afraid to object to Garrick's new *Hamlet*. He also was inclined to be lenient, lest a player be permanently or prematurely injured in the sight of the audiences:

...but we shall not criticise upon them [i e the faults of Henderson] . . . as they have been pointed out in the daily prints, and we would not chuse to prejudice him in the opinion of the public, as we find he is engaged at Drury Lane Theatre for the coming season, at a considerable salary, and when the town, we doubt not, will be vindicated in giving him greater applause than he has received at the Hay-market.

The passion for impartiality is openly avowed in the Address to the Public at the opening of the 1786 volume:

Upon the whole it has been the invariable Aim of the Proprietors to render this Work a Channel of real Instruction and Entertainment, without offending Party or Individual.

In spite of his caution, however, the critic was willing to declare *She Stoops to Conquer* the best comedy since *The Clandestine Marriage*, and was able to see the real differences between it and the general run of comedies in the period. He was also able to pick *The School for Scandal* as "certainly the best that has appeared upon our stage since the time of Congreve and Vanbrugh." *The Rivals*, however, did not appeal to him so much:

If we examine this comedy by the rules of criticism, many objections may be made to it. Few of the characters are new, and scarce any well-supported: those of Falkland and Miss Melville are the most *outré* sentimental ones that ever appeared upon the stage: the acts are long, in many parts uninteresting, and of course tedious. But the most reprehensible part is in many low quibbles and barbarous puns that disgrace the very name of comedy. Nevertheless there are some scenes lively, spirited, and entertaining; and if it were

properly pruned by a competent judge of what is called *Jeu de théâtre*, it might probably go down with less opposition.

He loses some of his standing with us when we find that he • hailed such a thing as Pratt's *Fair Circassian* as a great play. His best review is perhaps that of *The Beggar's Opera* after the attempt to improve the moral tone of that piece. In announcing the coming performance of a revised version, the *Town and Country* had said that "the laws of the drama will be enforced by the execution of Macheath." But after the performance (October, 1777), we read:

At Covent Garden Theatre the Beggar's Opera has been performed in the form of a moral tale, though all the indecent scenes remain. The poet and manager agree to do poetical justice, as they call it, and Macheath is sentenced to heave ballast upon the river for three years. The absurdity of this conclusion must strike every impartial person, who considers that Gay meant his opera as a burlesque upon the Italian opera, independent of the satire that everywhere prevails through it; therefore this alteration can be pronounced no other than a burlesque upon a burlesque. The managers have however lopt off part of the absurdity; but a great deal still remains; and we advise them to restore this excellent piece to its primitive state. Probably a well-painted scene of Mr. Richards, representing Woolwich and the Justitia hulk, might have induced them to give the opera this moral turn: but let them remember that this scene need not be lost; it is a very good pantomime scene, and may be introduced with more propriety in such a performance

And in November he scoffs at a further "purgation" and at a "gallery trap": "An act of mercy will be always acceptable to a British audience!" What a pitiful compliment for disturbing the ashes of Johnny Gay!"

The *Oxford Magazine, or Universal Museum . . . By a Society of Gentlemen, members of the University of Oxford*, which ran from July, 1768, to the end of 1776, published "accounts" of new plays with the briefest comment on them and on the actors. Only once or twice (in a criticism of Garrick in *The Rehearsal* and in one of the tragedy *Semiramis*) did the "theatrical intelligence" even approach a serious review. The same may be said.

of the *Lady's Magazine or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex*, from August, 1770, to 1785. Even the production of Goldsmith's and Sheridan's plays made slight difference in the meager comments which were occasionally attached to the "fables" of new plays, though it must be said that *The School for Scandal* was greeted with praise. *Every Man's Magazine; or, Monthly Repository of Science, Instruction, and Amusement*, July, 1771, to June, 1772, published the same "accounts" and brief comment. The *London Museum of Politics, Miscellanies, and Literature*, January, 1770, to December, 1771, was chiefly political in its interests, but it gave space to a number of essays on theatrical matters, particularly attacks on Garrick.

The *Westminster Magazine, or, The Pantheon of Taste* commenced with a preliminary number early in January, 1773. This number contained Goldsmith's "Essay on the Theatre, or a Comparison between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy," and also "The English Theatre," a review of recent plays at the theatres. This section was repeated in most issues of the magazine until 1782.<sup>48</sup> In it we find "fables" of new plays and a few comments, occasionally some paragraphs of good writing. About 1779, however, the criticism seems to become more serious and more able. The critic usually follows the formula of the Aristotelians: fable, sentiments, diction, etc. He is very much concerned with the "conduct of the fable," and attacks anything like an improbability. Indeed he is eager to see "real life" portrayed on the stage, and theatrical claptrap banished; but he fears that the audiences are not with him there. By the same instinct he is led to hope that Mrs. Cowley and other "female writers" will write honestly about love from the woman's point of view:

There are many situations of the female mind which have not yet been described, and they never can be, till the ladies themselves write honestly about love. The Muse of this fair Poetess seems to be

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<sup>48</sup> This magazine printed Thomas Holcroft's essays, "The Actor," from January to May, 1780. See pp. 296-98, below.

headstrong, and we hope will often run away with her into some of those situations.

He prefers the "sentimental Muse" to the present taste for "bustling, giggling comedies"; and yet he is opposed to "sermons on the stage." The rummaging among old plays for things to revive, instead of creating new ones, gets his scorn. Yet he is hopeful when Shakespeare's *Tempest* is revived; his pity meanwhile goes out to Shakespeare for the way he will be handled by Sheridan, Linley, and Loutherbourg—the reviser, the composer, and the scenic artist. Language in drama should be nervous and expressive, not regularly smooth, formal, or scholastic. Shakespeare is preferred to Ben Jonson, in spite of the latter's learning, and in spite of hatred for the imitations of Shakespeare's language. (How then could Robert Jephson, author of *Braganza*, be hailed by this critic as a dramatic genius?)

The *Sentimental Magazine; or, General Assemblage of Science, Taste, and Entertainment. Calculated to Amuse the Mind, to Improve the Understanding, and to Amend the Heart*, March, 1773, to the end of 1775, the *General Magazine, or Compleat Repository of Arts, Sciences, Politics, and Literature*, January to December, 1776, and the *Lottery Magazine; or, Compleat Fund of Literary, Political, and Commercial Knowledge*, July, 1776, to December, 1777, published the "accounts" of new plays on a few occasions, with here and there an essay, original or copied from some newspaper, on some other phase of theatrical entertainments.

A review of more importance is the *London Review of English and Foreign Literature*, by William Kenrick and others, No. I, January, 1775, to June, 1780. This is a literary review, but the reviewing of plays is approached through attendance at the performances. The spirit of the review could be guessed from the known character of the shameless, scurrilous journalist who edited it, and can be perceived in the first words printed in the section devoted to "Plays":

In this department of our Review, we shall probably subject ourselves to more invidious reflections than in any other; for of all the *genus irritabile vatum*, the *species* of dramatic poets are the most testy, as they are in general the most sprightly and superficial of all the votaries of the Muses. We shall be liable also to the inconvenience of opposing prepossession, from the Town's being poisoned (to use of the expression of old *Dennis*) with the partial criticisms that are poured into the public prints, on the exhibition of every new piece on the Theatre. In admiring the vivacity of these anonymous Critics, we cannot help compassionating the fate of poets, and reflecting on that line of Pope's

"Ten censure wrong for one who writes amiss."

Yet may not we say with the same poet?

"Sure of the two less dang'rous is th' offence,  
To tire our patience than mislead our sense!"

. . . But when presuming writers, whose *gentleman-like* orthography must be compassionately corrected by the printer, affect to set up for Critics; to boast the beauties of the ancients, whom they cannot read; and to decry the moderns, whom they cannot taste, we cannot but recommend to our readers to treat such Critics (not with compassion or complacence, but) with deserved contempt. Nothing indeed can be more truly contemptible, than the affected lamentations of such illiterate scribbles for the decay of dramatic genius and the literary sterility of the times!

There are others, indeed, who merit more consideration. They have pretensions to genius and taste; but let them not anticipate their progress to judgment. Let them become apprentices to the law, before they rush uncalled to the bar; at least before they place themselves on the bench. Let all go through the necessary gradations.

"Some have at first for Wits, then Poets past,  
Turn'd Critics next. . . ."

And if they

". . . Prove plain Fools at last;"

So be it. Don't let them jostle others in the race to prevent their pushing forward to the goal, at which they cannot themselves arrive

With this introduction to the gentleman we may pause for a moment to review the career of William Kenrick as it touches the development of theatrical journalism. Kenrick was a hack

writer whose violent temper, jealousy, and love of notoriety had brought him into conflict with most of the decent people in literary and political circles in London. He had become notorious as a libeler and as a thoroughly unscrupulous journalist. One of his early literary ventures was an irregular periodical called the *Kapelion, or Poetical Ordinary; Consisting of Great Variety of Dishes in Prose and Verse; Recommended to all who have a good Taste or keen Appetite. By Archimagirus Metaphoricus*, published in six numbers during 1750 and 1751. Two of the papers were devoted to theatrical discussions: one a parallel between Garrick and Barry in the character of Romeo, an excellent and impartial piece of criticism of acting; the other a letter complaining of the state of the stage, the ignorance and bias of the audiences, the prevalence of farce and pantomime, and the craze for novelty. Kenrick had attacked Fielding and Dr. John Hill in a dramatic satire which was published but not played in 1752. He was engaged in a long quarrel with both these men.<sup>44</sup> In 1759 he succeeded Goldsmith as a reviewer for the *Monthly Review* and soon afterwards made so vile an attack upon Goldsmith that even the printer of the *Monthly*, the unsavory Griffiths, was ashamed of it. He made many attacks upon Samuel Johnson, but could not draw Johnson into open quarrel. He wrote for the stage and was for a time patronized by Garrick; but he turned upon his patron in a pamphlet attack. After one of his plays had been produced, he quarreled with Garrick over the profits and challenged him to a duel which he had not the courage to go through with. He then turned upon Garrick with a gross satire that caused a tremendous storm of protest. Kenrick had to apologize in the newspapers; but he nevertheless did not relinquish anonymous libeling in those same columns. He became the leading writer in the *Gentleman's Journal*, in 1768, for which Goldsmith also wrote. He lived a busy and energetic life, but

<sup>44</sup> See Cross, W. L. *History of Henry Fielding, Esq.*, Vol. II, Chap. XXV.

his industry was always directed towards the damaging of other men's reputations and fortunes. The writing in the *London Review* which purported to be the reviewing of new plays was directed towards the same end.

Kenrick showed that he was more a scourge of persons than a critic of plays by his tendency in the *London Review* to spend more time dissecting the author's preface to a published play than analyzing the play itself. He was chiefly on the watch for signs of friendship between the author and the managers or the actors, for they suggested to him not friendship but sycophancy and gave him a chance to be sneering and cynically offensive. He complained of the "Town" that they were inclined to judge plays according to spite and prejudice—this was in reference to a musical piece of Henry Bate's, *A Blackamoor Wash'd White*—and yet he never showed signs of approaching plays in any other spirit. He seldom looked seriously at the play before him with any attempt to appraise sympathetically or even honestly; he picked upon the first thing that came to hand on which he could vent his coarse sarcasm. For example when Thomas Hull tried to adapt James Thomson's *Edward and Eleonora* to the stage of his day, Kenrick ridiculed him for presuming to touch up the work of an old master, and then, not feeling that that was enough, he declared that Thomson's play was worthless to begin with! Woodfall's adaptation of Richard Savage's tragedy, *Sir Thomas Overbury*, he called mutilation, and he pointed to the mutilation in passage after passage through a long review. He could not resist a spiteful quip at the expense of manager or actor or playwright, however little the quip might have to do with criticism; he, for example, remarked apropos of Colman's prelude, *New Brooms*, that Colman was now in the right rôle, for he would make a better sweeper than manager. It is Kenrick's style which distinguishes him from many other journalists of his day. His utter indifference to the consequences of his remarks or to their truth, so long as he created a sensation, gave a fine flourish

of abandon to his abuse. For example, read his review of Captain Ayscough's *Semiramis* (December, 1776), credit for which he thought due more to Dr. Thomas Francklin, the translator of Voltaire's works, than to the captain:

This author is no butterfly;<sup>45</sup> and yet the reverend translator of Voltaire's poetical works may, probably, think him a kind of scarlet humble-bee, or rather marauding drone of a wasp, who profits by the spoil of others' hives. Certain it is, that there is too little variation in this piece from Dr. Francklin's translation, to warrant the great disproportion, in point of profit, between the emoluments arising from three crowded benefit nights at the theatre, and the pitiful pittance of forty shillings a sheet from the booksellers Captain Ayscough, as a gentleman and a man of generosity, will, doubtless, take this circumstance into consideration, and, abiding by the adage *cedunt arma togae*, divide the profits fairly between himself and the Doctor. It is true, the Captain hath been at some pains to bring the ghost of Ninus out of the tomb, from which, in the original, a voice only is heard. But that this is an improvement we can by no means admit, however applauded it may be by those who take delight in the company of ghosts and apparitions. For our own part, we must confess ourselves to have been highly disgusted with the appearance of this same ghost, at the representation of the piece; the property-man, to mend the matter, having dressed him up in a blue surtout: so that he looked like an old Chelsea pensioner, posted there to prevent the surgeons from robbing the cemetery—We are rather surprized that the manager did not prevail on the author to prefer the *voice from the tomb* to a bodily ghost, as those unsightly gentry have been some time banished from the stage, in *Venice Preserved*, and some other tragedies, with good success.

Annoyed by Sheridan's having hinted in his preface that he was a gentleman, Kenrick begrudges any words of praise for *The Rivals*:

We must, indeed, frankly declare that though we laboured with some disgust through that heterogeneous mass of matter, which, instead of calling it, with propriety, a sentimental farce, he stiles a

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<sup>45</sup> He had just scoffed at a remark in the preface of a farce whose author had complained that his mere butterfly of a drama had been broken upon the wheel of criticism.

comedy; we yet discovered, with frequent surprize and pleasure, the *disjecta membra poetae* throughout; perceiving, with some satisfaction, the *stamina*, at least, of a fine genius for dramatic poesy

During the last years of this review there were other signatures to articles besides "K" for Kenrick; yet either they are merely masks for Kenrick, or he had kindred spirits at work with him, for the style continues much the same. Long reviews become very few and far between, and in 1780, the last year, the old Kenrick spirit has gone entirely. He himself had, in fact, died in 1779.

We meet with but two purely theatrical periodical publications during this decade. The first is Francis Gentleman's *Dramatic Censor or Critical Companion*. It is not entirely clear whether this work should be included among periodicals or not; it was published in two volumes in 1770; but the two volumes were apparently brought out at different times during the year, and there are indications that the essays were issued separately before being included in the bound volumes.<sup>46</sup> The work consists of elaborate critical essays upon the plays which were commonly played in the theatres of that date and upon the recently written plays. There are essays on Shakespeare's plays, the tragedies of Otway and Rowe, and up-to-date things like *The Clandestine Marriage* and Murphy's *Zenobia*. The form of the criticism is stiff: each scene is described in detail until the whole story is revealed with painstaking dullness; interspersed are observations upon the propriety, beauty, and dramatic effectiveness of each scene and the language in which it is composed; then follows a character sketch of each character, with a comparative study of the merits of the living (and sometimes dead) performers of the parts; and a final paragraph judges the merits of the

<sup>46</sup> Lowe, R. W. *Bibliographical Account of English Theatrical Literature*, p. 93: "It is met with frequently with frontispieces to both volumes, but as frequently without these. It seems to me to be complete in either state, the latter condition being probably in copies which have been bound from the parts in which it was originally issued. . . ."

play in general. Gentleman was a moralist in his demands upon the drama; his first question was whether the play had a good moral in it: "Having thus given a general delineation of the plot and arrangement of scenes, it becomes necessary to enquire for the moral, without which no dramatic piece can have intrinsic worth."<sup>47</sup> His inquiries for "morals" in Shakespeare's plays end in insipid and inappropriate findings: in *Hamlet* "all the moral we can deduce is, that murder cannot lie hid, and that conscience makes a coward of guilt."<sup>48</sup> He was something of a compromiser upon the neo-classic "rules"; for example, he was inclined to follow Johnson in the common sense attack upon the pedantic demand for unity of time and place, but he would not go so far as to excuse the utter freedom of *The Winter's Tale*.<sup>49</sup> He wrote much as other men of his day wrote and with many echoes of Dr. Johnson's criticisms, except that here and there he expressed opinions that have an air of fresh discovery about them. His reviews of new plays follow the same plan as those of the older plays. He was inclined to differentiate between the effect of a play in the theatre and that in the closet. The modern tragedies he did not find very powerful things to read though he admitted that some were pleasing on the stage. Modern comedy did not keep up to the comedy of Congreve. His criticisms of the actors are full of vivid descriptions of the way certain parts were played by different men. The two volumes are valuable sources of information about the stage at this era. The publication stands, however, somewhat apart from the study we are pursuing.

The *Macaroni and Theatrical Magazine; or, The Monthly Register of the Fashions and Diversions of the Times, etc.*, ran from October, 1772 to December, 1773. In spite of the fact that it sounds like a periodical which might be invaluable in our

<sup>47</sup> Gentleman, Francis. *The Dramatic Censor*, 1770, Vol I, p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 37.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol I, p. 40.

study, it contributes very little. It published "accounts" of new plays, usually with only the same brief comments which are to be found in less specialized journals or magazines, with only occasionally some added spirited comment of its own. It published a good deal of theatrical news and gossip, and now and then an essay on some phase of dramatic composition; for example, on the unities or on humor in comedy. Many of the "accounts" and other articles had appeared in other periodicals before being reprinted here.

## CHAPTER VI

1780 to 1795

At the opening of the last period of our study the status of theatrical criticism, in certain of its aspects at least, has become settled and fixed. New plays, for instance, will be certain of receiving serious and detailed reviews in six or more prominent daily or twice-a-week newspapers, these reviews will be echoed or actually reprinted in other newspapers and magazines; a few monthly reviews and magazines will also print original criticisms. At last it has become settled that no newspaper which bids for general circulation can neglect this aspect of the public demand for information. The value of the reviews as criticisms will depend, of course, upon the ability of the reviewer who happens to be working at any particular time upon this or that newspaper; here and there a series of criticisms flowers up for a short period and then dies away again, yielding the claim for attention to some other paper whose articles have suddenly begun to show new vigor and life. In the criticism of new plays, then, the situation by 1780 was practically what it is today. But it must be remembered that criticism in the earlier part of the century had not confined itself to the new plays. Under a system of repertory like that which prevailed until well into the nineteenth century, the occasions for the review of new plays were naturally comparatively few. The novelties in the theatres were the appearances of new actors in parts which had been taken by old favorites, the assumption by popular players of new parts, and the addition to the repertory of old plays newly revived and adapted. The function of the theatrical department of the newspaper,

then, was not always considered to be that of reporting upon new plays only, but upon these other novelties as well; and indeed it was often extended to include essays on aspects of drama and acting which were not called up by any current happening in the theatres. The critic on the *London Chronicle* in 1757, for example, did not ask of the performance which he reviewed whether it was something new to the public; the questions with him were whether he had written about it before, and whether he had anything to say about it. Thus we get from him, as we do from a number of other critics, including later Leigh Hunt and William Hazlitt, a body of dramatic criticism that is not bound up merely with the ephemeral productions of bygone theatrical seasons. Whether we get such a body of writing in the files of any newspaper in the period we are dealing with depends upon the existence on the staff of the paper of a man who is genuinely interested in the drama and in acting and not merely as a reporter of news, and who has some literary power himself. The study of these years leads us into the discussion of a succession of such critics who lift their respective papers into prominence for a short time in the eyes of those interested in the history of the theatre. We shall review rapidly the theatrical departments of the new papers of this era and then deal in some detail with the work of these men.

After the reviews which were written by Captain Cowley on the *Gazetteer*<sup>1</sup> in 1780 there is nothing to distinguish this newspaper. New plays were regularly reviewed, at first lengthily and with care, but by 1788 in very short notes without critical power. In 1791 the reports of the theatre had become almost daily paragraphs, but they were written by a reporter, not by a critic. In 1792 even the reviews of new plays had degenerated into what look dangerously like mere puffs.

The *General Evening Post* never regained the position of prominence which it held during the years from 1771 to 1773

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp 209-11.

as a "theatrical paper." We have seen that it fell away after 1775. In the next decade it prints the usual "accounts" of new plays and runs less and less frequent paragraphs of "theatrical intelligence," but no criticism of importance. It appears not to have employed its own critic in some years, for the only articles which it publishes are reprinted from other papers.

The *General Advertiser* shows an increasing emphasis upon theatrical reports. In 1780 there are almost daily paragraphs of "intelligence," amounting to little more than news notes. By the fall of 1782 long reports of new plays are frequently interspersed among the short notes. During 1785 the daily paragraphs contain sometimes full description of performances, and when they do they make better reading than the reports in any other newspaper during the year. And in 1785 a spirited critic frequently lengthens out his daily articles into criticism of actors or new plays. He worships the memory of Henderson as an actor—"he was nature itself"—and he loves to blow up living actors; for example, Holman when he tries Richard III, and Mrs. Siddons when she comes out in comedy. He is accustomed to wage war with other newspaper critics and succeeds in exposing one of them in an amusing fraud.

The *London Courant* in 1780 printed only the playbills—"by direction of the managers"—and announcements sent from the theatres. During the next year, however, it turns to giving frequent reviews of plays and players, even more frequent at that time than those in the *Morning Chronicle*, though they are of little importance as criticism. On October 13, 1781, was published No. I of "The Dramatist," addressed "To Authors, Actors, Critics, and Managers." This was the first of a series of four long articles printed as "leaders" in the newspaper. They dealt with the general subject of comedy and the proper characters in comedy.

In the *Public Advertiser* during this period we come upon the work of a critic who became somewhat notorious in his day. Be-

fore he began to write, the paper had been quite undistinguished in its theatrical department; it had published merely the "accounts" of new plays and frequent unmistakable puffs. After his advent the paper becomes one of the most prominent, and without doubt the liveliest, of "theatrical papers." In 1785 it also had the assistance of George Steevens to make its theatrical articles even more the talk of the town.

Charles Este was born in May, 1752, of poor parents, who were nevertheless desirous of seeing him tread in his uncle's steps, a former Bishop of Waterford.<sup>2</sup> He was sent to school first to a Mr. Allen in Chelsea and then to Westminster School. When through lack of means, he was unable to go on to Oxford, he studied with private teachers in London in a desultory fashion. At the age of seventeen he tried the stage, but gave up that career after eight months. He studied medicine and surgery and was finally admitted to the Company of Pharmacists. Before he had begun to practice, however, he resolved to read for divinity instead. His conversion he later described in these characteristic terms: "I paid my hairdresser to attend me at four in the morning; and from that hour my books were before me till nine or ten at night" He was ordained in 1777, and before long became attached to a populous parish in London and one of the King's reading chaplains at Whitehall, with the Bishop of London and the Archdeacon of Colchester as his patrons. He began to send in communications to the *Public Advertiser*, attracted the attention of the publisher, Henry Sampson Woodfall, and was engaged as an established contributor. His writings can be traced by their very peculiar style which drew down the scorn of his fellow-journalists but which seems to have attracted many readers to him. In 1787 in company with Major Edward Top-

<sup>2</sup> Information about the life of Este is to be found in the following sources: *My Own Life*, by Charles Este, Clerk, London, 1787; Taylor, John, *Records of My Life*, London, 1832, Vol. 2, pp 289-304; Rose, H J., *New General Biographical Dictionary*, 1848, "Charles Este"; Boaden, James, *Life of John Philip Kemble*, 1825, Book II, Chap. IV.

ham he instituted a daily newspaper, the *World, or Fashionable Advertiser*. Here he continued his writings about the theatre and about the fashionable world until 1790, when he sold his share in the journal and in consequence quarreled publicly with Topham. An occurrence in 1787 also has made it possible for us to know so much about his life. There appeared in a newspaper a "character" of the Reverend Mr. Este, which so injured his feelings that he replied in a pamphlet, *My Life*, and set forth the facts and motives of his life as he claimed they really were. He concluded the account with a defense of the career of the journalist; he claimed that the newspapers had raised the intelligence of the English populace above that of foreign peoples. At the same time, all that he longed for was a quiet life in the country, "the popularity, and the *internal praise*, of an ENGLISH GENTLEMAN and a CLERGYMAN of the CHURCH OF ENGLAND." After his retirement from the *World* he lived less in the public eye and lasted until well on into the next century (1829).

The popularity and influence of Este's theatrical criticisms are testified by two of his contemporaries who were in a position to know. John Taylor, dramatist and journalist and himself dramatic critic for the *Morning Post* at this time, wrote of him:

His compositions, though singular, and even whimsical in style, were of so original and so amusing a description, that Mr. Woodfall found it expedient to engage him as an established correspondent.

The literary contributions of Mr. Este were chiefly on theatrical topics, but always blended with miscellaneous matters. He was well acquainted with mankind, and an acute critic on theatrical merit. His learning and extensive reading enabled him to supply an abundance of illustrative quotations, classical and modern. There was always point, humour, and judgment in his theatrical decisions, which were strikingly manifested, notwithstanding the peculiarity of his style, that often rendered his criticism unintelligible to those who had not attended to his manner.<sup>3</sup>

James Boaden, author of biographies of J. P. Kemble, Mrs. Siddons, and Mrs. Inchbald, and editor of the Garrick Corre-

<sup>3</sup>Taylor, John. *Records of My Life*, Vol. 2, pp. 289-304.

spondence, and himself a theatrical critic whose work we shall discuss later, wrote of him:

... and though Mr Este was eccentric in point of style, yet he was a scholar, a gentleman, and a man of general reading; and with respect to theatricals, he really understood the subject; was conversant with foreign stages, as well as our own; and actually threw out in his rapid hints, rather than essays, much good remark and refined taste.<sup>4</sup>

These two men were, it must be admitted, more sympathetic in their attitude towards the eccentric journalist-divine than many of his journalist rivals were in his day and than most readers of today would be.

We can be sure of the presence of "Parson" Este in the columns of the *Public Advertiser* when we meet such a note as this (November 26, 1782):

Isabella, though now we believe more than a Decies repetita was last night played to a House as full as ever!

This cannot but be admitted as a Barometer of *Mrs. Siddons's Weight*. It is also to be mentioned as a circumstance rather reputable to the *Taste of the Times*, that however such *Noise and Nonsense* as the *Grecian Daughter* may by the Artifice of acting, have taken the Town by surprize; yet no sooner has the Power of acting been applied to the support of a contrary object than the Town have instantly rallied their routed Intellects and reinforced the Side of *Truth and Nature*.

Not to be misunderstood—Where the *Grecian Daughter* has been forced on three nights, *Isabella* has had a spontaneous Run of at least ten nights.

Southerne's *Isabella, or the Fatal Marriage* may not seem to our taste much nearer "truth and nature" than Murphy's *Grecian Daughter*; but Este was at least for weeding out of the approved repertory of the theatres many dull and sentimental tragedies, like *The Grecian Daughter*, *The Mourning Bride*, and *The Revenge*, and was forever urging his adored Mrs. Siddons, in her early London days, to go on to Shakespeare. He was much interested in acting and in his fragmentary way gave many hints

<sup>4</sup>Boaden, J. *Life of J. P. Kemble*, Book II, Chap. IV.

to new actors and actresses. He had a feeling for imaginative acting. His chief defect was that he inclined towards hero worship; while Henderson was in the ascendancy, Henderson could do no wrong and Kemble was but second-rate; after Henderson's untimely death, Kemble rose to supremacy and then he could do no wrong. By the time he was writing for the *World* (1787-90), Este had become almost too much given to panegyric to be of much service. And at all times it is necessary to endure the most atrocious distortions of language in order to get at his few critical judgments.

His style [said John Taylor] seemed to be founded on that of Sterne in his "Tristram Shandy," consisting of odd breaks, with lines interspersed, and whimsically compounded phrases, strongly studded with quotations, but always connected, forcible and shrewd, in the opinion of those who thought proper to read his articles with attention.<sup>5</sup>

At times the phrases are so distorted as to be unintelligible; there is almost never any grace of language; oddness is deemed sufficient justification. Yet he was one of the early writers to recognize the greatness of Mrs. Siddons as Lady Macbeth:

*The Lady of Macbeth—Of Mrs. Siddons.* Never was the character so finely conceived—never was it adorned with so many great and striking beauties as in its impersonification of this day.

Impressing,—contemptuous—tyrannic—remorseless—murderous and repentant—and all so well combined—so well given—so much true sublime and beautiful in every part—that it leaves all the great performances of Mrs. Siddons herself at a distance. It is the *Venus of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, or the *Clandestine Marriage of Colman*.

In fact, there is either in the mind of the SIDDONS—or at least in the minds of others—a *something* that has always fought up against her *acted* scenes of tenderness and plaintive feeling.

Here her countenance—full of forcible and even terrific expression—conveys its own striking character, and exceeds commendation.

We hesitate not to say therefore it is the triumph of all her art—It is more—for it combines more than ever existed at once in the same person—for we hold it as perfect as the Lear of *Garrick*, or the

<sup>5</sup>*Loc. cit.*

Falstaffe of *Henderson*—and as natural and appropriate as the Drugger of *Weston* or the Cowslip of *Mrs Wells*.

Can we say more?—Have we not noticed in one word the extremes of the finest and yet most varied action that ever graced the stage?<sup>6</sup> Three weeks later he has some hints for a better production of *Macbeth* that suggest a good deal about Kemble's performance:

*The Siddons.* What is wanting to make *Macbeth* the wonder of the world, but more becoming cooperation with the Lady?

A less monotonous, a more discriminating Macbeth—witches more terrific—and the cunning of the scene aided by a better preservation of the costumes—gothic scenes—occasional darkness, etc etc<sup>7</sup>

Henderson's Falstaff called forth this rhapsody in jargon:

Adjusting the ratio of difference between the poet and the actor—Sam Johnson's rapture of praise is the property of Henderson, in part with Shakespeare—“*Unimitated—unimitable*”—are equally, tho' in unequal measures of proportion applicable to both.

More applicable to the actor this eulogy never was than last night—and thereabouts particularly with Pistol in the Second Act, “Thou, unconfinable baseness,” and the words “shuffle, budge and lurch”—and yet more on the receipt of the letter in the fourth act . . . The letter, it is to be recollected, is the *actor's praise alone*—Shakespeare not having set down a single syllable—but “Come into my chamber”—though there is the extended interval between dispositions and emotions the most discordant and remote, to be filled up and got over.

In quick, yet discernible transitions, passing from the most obstinate rage and rejection of present suffering (the Devil take one party and his Dam the other—I have been beat, etc etc) into the most bland pliability of credulous, cozenable hope.

This accordingly he does and in such a manner as almost shames language! At any rate, of looks, gestures and interjections it is a triumph!<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Public Advertiser*, February 8, 1785

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, February 28, 1785.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, November 2, 1785. It was this review which the *General Advertiser* pounced upon as a fraud; for Este went on to criticize the performance of an actor in a minor rôle who had been too ill to perform on November 1. Though the *General Advertiser* expected that its exposure of the fraud would ruin Este's reputation, he went on writing. He was called

A characteristic review of someone outside the circle of idolatry may be given to conclude the specimens of this eccentric critic's work:

The *Richard of Holman*. "Aye, every inch a King!" was the praise of Garrick's *Richard*—as well as of his *Lear*. It is the dispraise—and in a nice age what greater dispraise can well be—that *here* the reverse is all true?—The strong marks of Mr. *Holman's* performances are, excessive vulgarity of action and delivery. He is *Demosthenes* at practice, and the very pebbles in his mouth. In almost every action with his arms, his shoulders are raised above his head. For this "principium et fons" he should observe the *ballets d'action* of the Opera in public—and call in *Simonet* in private—The Graces are now expected to attend everything.

Of his judgment—something is to be said for, and much more against him. His scene with Lady Anne wanted all that Garrick had—the fawning—the changes of voice—and simulation of character—And in his soliloquies he indulged a vulgar and low appearance of humour—aided by the act of sticking both hands upon his hips.

"I'll have her—but I'll not *keep* her long"  
was given with a vulgarity unknown even to the "Kings of Brentford!" In fact, all his playful humour was bad.

His starting from the couch was indeed novel—but a retrograde improvement for the worse—and could only be tolerated on the Dublin stage.

Of merit—were all his exits—though in this praise we mean not that he should go off the stage entirely. All the scenes of battle and agitation in his tent were likewise of effect, and his dying scene—the fell spirit and reluctance of death were well portrayed.

On the capture of Buckingham—"Off with his head! So much for Buckingham!"—once so great with Garrick—rapid—and full of savage joy—were given by Mr. Holman with the deliberation of a judge. In balance of this, his

"Strike up alarum drums!  
Let not these tell-tale women  
Rail on the Lord's anointed!"

was of much merit

"the unintelligible, half-sentence, dash critic"; and, by the *Morning Post*, "the intuitive critick," and "an illiberal newspaper dealer in puzzling periods, and awkward and unmeaning attempts at wit and poignancy."

Our last words to Mr. Holman—*et decies repetita*—are THE GRACES!—and in the language of Dr. Ford<sup>9</sup>—“an easy delivery”—Mrs Bates had much praise—and the little Duke of York, tho’ least was not last.

The funeral of Henry was the *merriest* death we ever saw—as all the attendants were laughing—to the very beef-eater—Miss Ranoe—whom we have often seen—but never heard—*looks* a good actress—and we make no doubt is very perfect in her part—“and he that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”<sup>10</sup>

Este left the *Public Advertiser* to conduct a new paper called the *World, or Fashionable Advertiser*, the first number of which appeared on January 1, 1787. He was associated in it with Major Edward Topham. Topham undertook the publication of this newspaper with a very definite aim: the advancement of the career of his mistress, Mrs. Wells.<sup>11</sup> “Gallantry began what literature supported and politics finished.” The *World* was at first distinguished from its rivals by its indifference to politics. After a few lines given to news from the *Gazette*, it turned at once to news of Court, Carlton House, Bath, the galas, the opera, and private scandal about town. It printed more about politics and even reported parliamentary debates after 1788—and hence perhaps the allusion in the quotation just given. Contributors to the paper were Robert Merry (“Della Crusca”), Hannah Cowley (“Anna Maria”), and the other “Della Cruscans,” whose poetry was first published in this newspaper; M. P. Andrews and Edward Jerningham, the dramatists; and R. B. Sheridan himself. The paper strove to make fame for itself through the eccentricity of its style throughout, and doubtless Este was more or less responsible for the particular style which was adopted. Certainly

<sup>9</sup> A notorious man-midwife of the period.

<sup>10</sup> *Public Advertiser*, January 15, 1785.

<sup>11</sup> See the biographical sketch of “Major Topham” in *Public Characters of 1805*, pp. 205 seq. This sketch, says Mrs. Wells in her memoirs, was prepared by Topham himself. For further details about the conduct of the paper see also *Memoirs of Mrs Sumbel (late Wells)*, Written by herself London, 1811, Vol. I, pp 59 seq ; and II, 209-12.

the paper became extremely popular; it was claimed that it exceeded all its rivals in its circulation and that it "gave the *tone* to politics." A rising dramatist of the day was overjoyed to get

- Topham's private commendation of his play before it was produced, for he considered him "almost the manager's manager."<sup>112</sup> The chief concern of the theatrical department, however, was the shameless puffing of Mrs. Wells whenever she appeared on the stage. Yet Topham professed to hold lofty notions about the impartial conduct of this department, and refused with a grand gesture to assist Kemble's reputation in comedy.<sup>113</sup> Este doubtless did the writing of the theatrical criticism; we can easily recognize the style. He continued to eulogize Mrs. Siddons, and, since Henderson was now dead and Este and Kemble had become friends, Kemble was raised to the place of eminence held by Henderson before. Este had lost some of his distaste for the sentimental drama of his day; although he continued to denounce in general the modern dramatists, he let any new play go by with very lenient criticism; indeed he even crowned Robert Jephson a new dramatic genius. (His standards of measurement may be judged from the statement that Jephson was the best poet in England with the exception of "Della Crusca"!) Este continued to disturb his fellow critics with the eccentricities of his style and with his puffing propensity, but the best of his writing had been done on the *Public Advertiser*; he gradually withdrew from active writing and sold out in 1790. After his retirement the theatrical criticism in the *World* had not even the merit of his annoying mannerisms.

Another group of articles in the *Public Advertiser* during 1785 suggests the hand of George Steevens. James Boaden in his *Life of John Philip Kemble*<sup>114</sup> definitely ascribes to Steevens a banter-

<sup>112</sup> *Life and Times of Frederick Reynolds, written by himself*, London, 1826, Vol. II, p. 31.

<sup>113</sup> *Memoirs of Mrs. Sumbel (late Wells)*, Vol. II, pp. 209-12.

<sup>114</sup> American Edition, 1826, pp. 138-39.

ing review of Mrs. Siddons and Smith in *Macbeth*. The other articles are smart paragraphs about the managers and about the other critics, and they abound in personalities of the kind which made Steevens the "outlaw" he was at this time. Now and then there is a hint of the Shakespearean scholar in his advice about the playing of some part or the reading of some line.<sup>15</sup> One interesting feature is that while Este in other paragraphs was puffing Mrs. Wells, Steevens was at the same time ridiculing her pretensions and those of "the Tip-top Adjutant, Captain Epilogue," Topham.

There was a third critic at work on the *Public Advertiser* during the same year, one who was lenient towards all men and all plays. The newspaper continued to report the theatrical affairs through the decade, but it printed few long discussions. It can be consulted for reviews of new plays and for short accounts of all novelties and regular performances as well. In 1792, indeed, it is perhaps the best London paper for full accounts of the developments.

The *St. James's Chronicle* during this last period of our study has a continuous series of paragraphs of comment upon the theatrical performances. A very independent critic is at work; there is a sharp, caustic turn to his disapproval which suggests Steevens but of this identification we cannot be certain. The critic, at any rate, holds a pretty high standard for dramatic composition and for performance. He is none too gentle with new actors and actresses. He is somewhat suspicious of the classic art of the Kemble's; he is afraid that the art of declamation is gradually displacing tragic acting on the stage. He is no idolator of Mrs. Siddons, though he recognizes her greatness. He complains that she is too guarded and methodical in manner to be able to give similar parts a really different color, that she uses too much artifice always, and that she tends towards declamation. He is especially firm in his dislike of her in comedy. Characteristic pas-

<sup>15</sup> See *Public Advertiser*, January 22, February 1, 3, and 11, 1785.

sages on the Kemble style of acting are the following, the first on Kemble's début at Drury Lane on September 30, 1783, and the second on his Romeo five years later:

On Tuesday evening the Elder of the Kembles made his appearance at this Theatre in the Character of Hamlet, and bids fair in every Respect to obtain that Regard and Encouragement which his Sister enjoyed in so eminent a Degree last Winter. After the Tremor of a first Appearance had subsided he seemed entirely himself, and used every Exertion to make the Character a true Copy of Nature, which he effected beyond our Expectation.—The Closet Scene excited our Admiration in an especial Manner; throughout it was one of the finest pieces of Acting since Mr. Garrick's Days—Where Polonius is killed behind the Arras, and Hamlet says, "Is it the King?" the universal Plaudits of the Audience were not to be resisted. We will point out, however, a few Faults, which with very little Attention may be soon amended.—A Mediocrity of Tone, which might reach the Ears of the Audience, ought always to be observed, which in the most Pathetick Scenes was now and then let drop, to the great Distress of some who were no farther distant than the Extremity of the Boxes. This proceeds not from want of Extent in Voice, and may therefore soon be corrected.—The frequent Pauses which render a Performance beautifully characteristick were in most cases very judiciously applied, and most cautiously adapted to the Sensations; but it happened now and then that they were continued too long—Few, if any, of the present Heroes of the Stage have arrived at Perfection in the principal Branch of good Acting; it is therefore no Wonder that the most judicious Performer, would, on a first Night, appear under this Disadvantage.—A few Words were exchanged, and a few Lines here and there omitted, which we place to the Account of Trepidation. and we think the last Speech was delivered rather too forcibly for a dying man. (*St. James's Chronicle*, September 30-October 2, 1783.)

In 1788 the *St. James's Chronicle* made the following objection to the idolatry of the Kembles—"the Kemble religion," as Hazlitt called it later—which was already well established:

Notwithstanding the daily Decisions of Immortality which are profusely scattered on the Subject, we have our Family Doubts on Kemble's Romeo. We highly esteem the Talents of the Family; and wish only to limit them to their Province. We never mean the slight-

est injury to private Character. In common Life the Kembles may be everything that is amiable; but on the Stage the tender Passions disown them.

In these paragraphs are many shrewd and interesting comments upon the drama. As the authors of tragedies had lately, since *The Critic* (1779), seen fit to try to fight back at Sheridan in prologues and epilogues and prefaces, this critic takes them to task:

We think it impolitick in the Votaries of the Tragick Muse to discover, as they have lately done, on all Occasions, an unrelenting Resentment against the *Critick*. We should not wonder at Sheridan's immediately adopting the Tomb Scene,<sup>16</sup> in Return for the Notice taken of him Ridicule, in the Theatre, if not in more important Situations, is the Test of Truth; and the only Way to blunt the light and feeble Shafts of the Authour of the *Critick* and all the Friends of Pantomime and Pantomimical Comedy, is to produce a good Tragedy.

On the whole he does not find in modern tragedy much that satisfies; Cumberland, who was one of the most popular tragic writers, he describes as wanting in the "vigor and manly majesty" necessary for tragedy; Hannah More's *Percy*, he hopes, will be banished from the stage because of its interminable declamation; Robert Jephson's *Count of Narbonne* has no "truth or probability" in it. Comedy has been getting nearer and nearer to pantomime by the use of more and more "Incidents and Surprise" instead of "a well-contrived Fable." The one place in modern drama where this critic can let himself go with perfect freedom is in the appreciation of farce, and especially the farces of John O'Keeffe. It will be remembered that Leigh Hunt and William Hazlitt welcomed O'Keeffe's honest farce in contrast with the hollow tragedy and sentimental comedy of their days. The *St. James's* critic wrote on July 6-8, 1784:

Aristotle has defined Tragedy and Comedy. We, his Disciples, the Critics of News-Papers, have, therefore, some Phrases and Terms, if

<sup>16</sup> In *The Siege of Sinope* by Mrs Frances Brooke, which was the play under review. *St. James's Chronicle*, January 30-February 1, 1781.

not Principles and Rules, to give Plausibility and Effect to our Decisions. But in Farce we are left to our own Imaginations and Feelings, if we should happen to have any Farce is an unlimited Region of happy Absurdities, Antitheses, Puns, and Repartees. These should be brought together by a Fable as improbable and Characters as extravagant as possible.

After several weeks in which the chief topic of discussion was the rivalry between two poor tragedies on the same subject—the *Lord Russel* by William Hayley and that by Dr. Thomas Stratford—the critic turned with relief to O'Keeffe's *Peeping Tom* (September 4-7, 1784):

After laughing at Horrors with Dr Stratford and languishing at Sentiments with Mr. Hayley, we are sincerely glad to meet again our merry Acquaintance Mr. O'Keeffe We owe him many Thanks for dissipating the little Fogs to which our Minds are subject, and often shaking us by hearty Laughter into Hilarity and Health We have meditated Reproofs and Reprehensions of his Irregularities and Offenses; but he has never left us Gravity enough to apply them

During the last years of the decade, the *St. James's Chronicle* critic, whether the same man as before or not, became more bitter in complaint against the Kembles, particularly John Kemble in his management of Drury Lane Theatre. He was in rebellion also against the romantic atmosphere of contemporary tragedy:

We wish it could be brought to the Recollection of Managers and Writers that Dramatic Audiences are ignorant of real life; that they frequent Tragedies not merely to be imposed upon, but to be agreeably instructed; and that in the Tragedies real life is hardly ever represented. The Managers seem industrious to find out Dramatic Poets, who are unacquainted with actual Incidents and never delineate the People we live with. Their Fancies are perpetually bloated by fictitious Monsters and extravagant Caricatures: Being enjoined probably to regard all Things in Subservience to sudden Surprises and Strong Emotions.

In the early years of the next decade, while the almost continuous reporting goes on, the spirit of the paragraphs has lost much of its characteristic tone and has ceased to be more than . that of a daily reporter of news.

The second decade of William Woodfall's criticism in the *Morning Chronicle* does not keep up to the level of the first. Whereas in 1778, for example, there had been almost daily articles about new plays, revivals, new performances, or familiar performances newly looked at, during the years 1780-84 there were published fewer and fewer reports, new plays and revivals were reviewed carefully and once in a while a new performer was given some detailed advice; but the writing had lost much of its zest and freshness, political news and parliamentary debates were crowding out the theatrical department. In 1785 there appear to have been at least two men writing the criticisms;<sup>17</sup> a large amount of space is given to theatrical news and criticisms again—sometimes as much as three columns; new plays are carefully reviewed, plot, characters, language, scenery, performance, point by point. These long reviews do not, however, make as good reading as the earlier work of Woodfall; they lack enthusiasm and any trenchant critical power. By 1788 the paragraphs have become frequent again, but they are chiefly reports, with one-line judgments—e.g. "Kemble looked the part and represented the character very well"; "the play has *vis comica*," or "gained applause," or the like. The next year saw the theatrical entirely swallowed up by the parliamentary reports. After March, when Woodfall left to publish the *Diary*, there was no critic to take his place and the department fell away lamentably. New plays were reviewed, but without Woodfall's knowledge or sense or literary ability. During that year a series of "Theatrical Traits" by "Polydore" was printed; it consisted of estimates of the powers of various actors. For the next three years the department became regular again, though it contained no very readable criticism. In the middle of the 1790's there were very few attempts at lengthy, serious criticism, even of new plays.

<sup>17</sup> A review of *Cymbeline* was published on November 22, 1785; on November 23 Woodfall wrote to say he had not been present on the first night and then he published a long review of the play.

As so frequently happened in the early days of journalism, as now, the reports of the theatres were in the hands of mere reporters, not critics. In 1800 the *Morning Chronicle* secured the services of John Campbell, a young law student, who carried on a very admirable department for several years.

When he left the *Morning Chronicle*, Woodfall instituted the *Diary, or Woodfall's Register*, the first number of which appeared on March 30, 1789. He purposed to write the whole of this newspaper himself and wore himself out doing so, as Leigh Hunt was to do a generation later on the *Tatler*, 1834-36. Among the statements of purpose in the Address to the Public we read:

All the Novelties of the Theatre and of every publick Spectacle shall be duly and candidly regarded, but if any of his readers should conceive, that he will fall in with the fashion and send empty nonsense abroad, clothed in a fantastick garb, like those who are not ashamed to profit by the frivolity of the age, they will find themselves mistaken. Much as he loves to Laugh he cannot consent to make himself ridiculous, merely for the sake of exciting the laughter of others.

Woodfall refers, of course, to the frivolous and sensational style of Este and Topham in the *World*. The theatrical criticism in the *Diary* is not all written by Woodfall himself. The news of the theatres is written by some one who signs himself "SOLRAC" (i.e. "Carlos"?); he writes in a conventional reporter's style. But in even the longer critiques which can be safely attributed to Woodfall the spirit in these later years is not much above that of reporting news; he has fallen into stereotyped phrases and judgments; hence we cannot be sure how much of the criticism here is actually Woodfall's. The *Diary* did not prove successful. The paper had been chiefly concerned, it appears, in upholding the slave trade, provided the trade were properly licensed. Woodfall tried to compete single-handed in the reporting of the Parliamentary debates with the larger forces of the other papers. He had indeed made an innovation in reporting, for his paper was the first to report the debates on the very day following.<sup>18</sup> Wood-

<sup>18</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, "William Woodfall."

fall, however, lost a good deal of money and injured his health before he closed the run of the paper with the last number, August 31, 1793. In this number he wrote an account of his career as an editor, Parliamentary reporter, critic, etc. As to his career as theatrical critic he wrote:

As a Theatrical Critick zealously ardent for the success of the Drama, from a thorough conviction that a well-regulated stage was the best possible succedaneum to the laws of a free country, the Printer early in life assumed the office, and is led to flatter himself that his constant attention to the productions and performances of each play-house, has neither discouraged the efforts of Dramatic Writers, nor damped the exertions of Comedians.

Loath to leave such activities, he promised in a note that any further observations which he would have to make on plays and players would be communicated through the "family paper," the *Public Advertiser*.

Now we may look at the work of Woodfall as a critic, for we may consider it as finished. Through a long period he had gained and held a prominence as a critic attested to by many witnesses. A periodical called the *Devil* remembers the effect which the *Morning Chronicle* had on its first appearance nearly twenty years before:

Twenty years ago, except the Daily Advertiser, there were but three morning papers; the Gazetteer was an advocate for the ministry, the Public Advertiser a vehicle for the animadversions of opposition, and the Ledger boasted of being open to all parties, but influenced by none.—The Morning Chronicle some time after this made its appearance, and having no set task like the others, attacked everything—its strictures on the theatres were particularly severe, for scarcely would an actor of twenty shillings a week pass muster, till he had been drilled by this censorial serjeant-major.<sup>19</sup>

The same writer noticed the falling-off in Woodfall's writing in the later years, however; for he wrote:

Mr. Woodfall has totally lost his knack at dramatic criticism:

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<sup>19</sup> The *Devil*, No. XI (Vol I, p 171).

where are the judicious remarks, the examinations fraught with good sense and experience, that formerly marked the strictures of this gentleman?<sup>20</sup>

- Another contemporary journalist makes a similar comparison between the early and late work. The author of the essay paper, the *Bystander*, 1789-90, wrote of Woodfall's critique upon *The Force of Fashion* by Henry Mackenzie:

I acknowledge that in the critique in the *Diary* I begin to recognize *a little* that very Mr. WOODFALL whose judicious and impartial remarks on theatrical subjects were formerly the admiration of all those who watched the drama with a jealous eye, because, being the fountain of public taste, it is of national importance that it should be kept pure and uncorrupted<sup>21</sup>

David Garrick expressed his confidence in Woodfall's impartiality as a critic, in his reply to the letter which we have already quoted; but it must be added that Mrs. Garrick, in looking over her husband's correspondence, has written on the back of that reply, "The answer to that puppy Woodfall by my husband, 1773."<sup>22</sup> John Taylor wrote from personal acquaintance:

I was well acquainted with Mr. Woodfall, and can bear a cordial testimony to his moral worth, and the candour and justice of his theatrical criticisms. He always seemed to touch the true points of merit and defects in a drama, or in the performance; but while he proved his judgment, he was always warm in his panegyrics and lenient in his censure. When attending any new drama, or new performer, his attention seemed by the expression of his features to approach to severity, though there was nothing like it in his heart<sup>23</sup>

This judgment is corroborated by a few lines in "An Address spoken by Mr. Bannister, Junior, at the Haymarket on Miss George's first and second appearances in *The Romp*," published in the *European Magazine* for September, 1786:

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 18-19

<sup>21</sup> *The Bystander*, 1790 (reprint), p. 282 (December 12, 1789).

<sup>22</sup> See above, pp. 223-4, and Boaden *Private Correspondence of David Garrick*, Vol. I, pp. 583 seq

<sup>23</sup> Taylor, J. *Records of My Life*, Chap. LII, New York, 1833, pp. 372-73.

The *Chronicle* at last  
 Fame's pleasing trump, without one envious blast,  
 Good-natur'd (*Woodfall*) ne'er can genius rob,  
 With nothing black about him—but his bob

R. B. Peake, the biographer of the Colman family, tells an interesting story of his boyhood, when he used to be allowed behind the scenes of the Haymarket Theatre and occasionally shown the letters which Woodfall would write privately to George Colman after the production of a new play, criticizing "with friendly zeal, the composition and performance, and recommending such alterations as none but a studious observer and sincere and experienced lover of the drama could have suggested;"<sup>24</sup> and Peake, as he says, "had then the opportunity of marking the distinction between candid, unimpassioned and genuine criticism, and the frothy nonsense, which it has of late years been my destiny to peruse in a large portion of the critiques issuing from the modern press." The influence of Woodfall's published criticisms is claimed by the author of his obituary notice in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1803, Volume II, page 792, to have been decisive of the fall or fortune of a new play or performer. While such a sweeping statement would be difficult to prove or disprove, it suggests the reputation which he had in his day.

Woodfall took the position of theatrical critic with great seriousness. He was jealous of the standing of the newspaper critics, and was quick to resent any slurs upon their honesty and ability. When Garrick opened the season of 1774-75 with a new *Prelude* in which the newspapers were spoken of with respect, Woodfall wrote his appreciation in these words:

Mr. Garrick's mention of the newspapers does his understanding some credit; he speaks of them properly and as men in public situations should do.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Peake, R. B. *Memoirs of the Colman Family*, London, 1840, Vol II, p. 426.

<sup>25</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, September 19, 1774. The prelude was called *The Meeting of the Company; or, Bayes's Art of Acting*.

But when the newspapers became inclined to lose their heads and shower too much praise upon Garrick, Woodfall was careful to reprove them. Sheridan's attack upon newspaper writers in *The Critic* seems to have completely upset Woodfall; as a result he could see little to praise in the play, except the performance of the actors; and he added to his review of the play a protest against the direct attack upon the newspapers:

The ridicule upon newspapers is in many cases very just, but in the warmth of resentment (for the whole piece is obviously rather an act of angry retaliation than a dramatic satire, founded on general principles), Mr. Sheridan has been carried too far. Possibly the satire on advertisements addressed to the affluent and humane, may deprive some worthy objects of that relief which their distresses might otherwise receive from the benevolent. Many of those advertisements may be impositions on the sensibility of mankind, but many we know are not so, and to write humanity out of countenance is neither liberal nor laudable.

The Morning Chronicle being particularly *advertized* in *The Critic*<sup>26</sup> it was our earnest wish to have been warranted to give the piece the *puff direct*, we should have been well contented with having been the cause of wit in others, if it were determined that we had not wit ourselves, but "truth to say," the *Critic* will not bear such an account, excepting only with regard to the performers, who deserved it richly.<sup>27</sup>

A more direct defense of his profession Woodfall had made earlier in commenting upon the epilogue to Dr. Thomas Franklin's tragedy, *Matilda*:

The epilogue was pleasantly delivered by Miss Young, and turned upon a lucky thought well pursued, of challenging the jury. Our reverend author, it seems, would strike out of the panel

*Critics, news-writers, and wits.*

By *wits*, as a compliment, we suppose, he signifies all his brother authors, imagining with Gay that

*No author ever lov'd a brother;  
Wits are game-cocks to one another*

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<sup>26</sup> See the opening lines of the play.

<sup>27</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, November 1, 1779.

It is, however, something extraordinary that one who is himself so well known as an author (to be sure a wit) and Critical Reviewer, should chuse to stigmatize them as illiberal employments.

As to news-writers, why should they be precluded from relating the casualties of a theatre, more than any other occurrences, and why should the literary bill of mortality be more sacred than the natural? The reverend author has no right to complain. Though *The Earl of Warwick* owed his existence to *LaHarpe*, and *Matilda* her origin to Voltaire, we shall not *increase the burials this week*, by killing him of the *French distemper*—a very common end to the writers of our theatre—Or if we do now and then prematurely report the death of a gentleman, though his friends may be alarmed for a moment, is not his appearing alive and merry, the next day, the most agreeable refutation of our intelligence? The dramatist, in like manner, if there is *life and soul in him* is sure to give the most convincing proofs of any spurious accounts that he is dead. The reverend Doctor seems fond of guarding his dialogue with fragments of plays. We shall conclude, therefore, with repeating from Peachum in *The Beggar's Opera*,

“Every one in his way; it is the Captain’s

business to rob, and ours to take robbers”

Every one in his way, Doctor.

In 1780 Woodfall gave Henderson some fatherly advice not to ignore the criticisms published in newspapers, for they could tell him things for his own good; a few weeks before he had had the painful experience of observing Henderson sticking to his own interpretation of the “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow” speech of Macbeth instead of adopting his, Woodfall’s, which had been pointed out in a review. Frequently we find Woodfall calling attention, however, to alterations which had been made in plays or performances in accordance with his own criticisms; as for example, on October 14, 1779, in a discussion of the alterations which Richard Cumberland made in his adaptation of Massinger’s tragedy *The Bondman*.

With this seriousness of outlook Woodfall went to work to analyze carefully every new play, with the intention of giving excellently sensible reasons for his approval or disapproval. He

was inclined somewhat towards the old conventional phraseology of "fable," which must be "well-conducted," the "characters" which must be "well supported," the "diction" which must be "chaste and elegant," and so forth. Yet he so sincerely enjoyed himself in the theatre and was so clearly interested in the matters he discussed that his expression took on a force which many of the perfunctory critics of his day never achieved. His criticism inclined towards the sensible, rationalistic, rather than towards the imaginative. For example, his criticism of Henderson as Falstaff made no attempt to give his readers a sympathetic account of the interpretation of Falstaff as Henderson's acting brought it before one's imagination, but rather attempted to judge whether Henderson was "just," "accurate," and had a "true conception" of the part. This led, of course, as it had done often before in theatrical criticism (and still does), to careful study of the character as the dramatist intended him to be. Woodfall furthermore went into minute detail in his criticism of the emphasis upon words and phrases, of gestures and tones, of points of costume or scenery, even of pronunciation. He was interested in all these details and had theories about them. His discussion of them brings up images of the acting of his day and lets us see with more than common vividness some of the performances.

His taste in drama was varied. It began with a genuine love of Shakespeare; not Shakespeare as altered by the hacks of the eighteenth century, but Shakespeare in the original. Every return to the original text he greeted with thanks and praise. When he found fault with Shakespeare it was with the reservation that with all the faults there were still more beauties than anywhere else. *The Tempest* might be called not a good acting play, but it remained a beautiful work; *Much Ado about Nothing* was approached with the usual formula:

This play is very happily characterized in the title; yet probably a greater fund of entertainment was never derived from materials

so apparently unpromising—The fable is to the last degree improbable; there is nothing striking in the incidents, and the passages particularly designed to interest us are much more calculated to provoke our ridicule than to affect our sensibility—Notwithstanding all these capital defects, the genius of the immortal author sets criticism at defiance—and the heart is absolutely delighted, in spite of every argument offered by the understanding—The exquisite vivacity of Benedick and Beatrice; the intimate acquaintance with human nature displayed in the characters of the Town Clerk, Dogberry and Verges, and finally the admirable scene between Leonato and Antony, after the repudiation of Hero, these are such atonements for the deficiencies which we have presumed to point out, that if the piece is but tolerably performed, the faults are always either concealed by the fresh succession of beauties, or, like Uncle Toby's oath in the story of poor LeFevre, give the beauties additional force from the very singular nature of their connection<sup>28</sup>

His affection for the plays and his familiarity with them are further revealed in the many discussions of the actors' interpretations of the famous parts. An example of his criticism of this sort may be given by quoting part of his discussion of Henderson as Shylock:

But in the trial scene he is too energetic, and shews more sensibility than can in nature be worn outwardly by a man of that fixed mind which makes the character of Shylock. There is a calm, determined turn of thought obvious in the very speeches of the Jew throughout this scene, which contradicts Mr. Henderson's manner of acting it, and will serve to convince every person (who will give himself the trouble to read the play) that he errs egregiously. No man so passionately eager for the *pound of flesh* would with that hellish kind of apathy (if we may so phrase) have proposed such a penalty or by a most provoking appearance of not wishing to exact it, have cozened Antonio into signing the obligation.

Shylock is actuated throughout the play by

"A lodged hate, a deadly loathing"

a principle of settled malignity which always wears a smooth unruffled outside, or it would never obtain its purpose.

Another violent error in our eyes is the manner of Mr. Henderson's saying to Portia,

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<sup>28</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, November 7, 1775.

"Is it so nominated in the bond?

"I cannot find it: 'tis not in the bond."

Does any man on perusing the scene, think these are lines to be given seriously, as if Shylock were really unapprised, that the having • a surgeon ready to stop Antonio's wounds was a term which the bond forbore to mention? The lines are obviously ironical and ought to be spoken sneeringly.<sup>29</sup>

Finally it may be mentioned that Woodfall was bitterly opposed to the custom of actors to learn their Shakespeare from the prompt books rather than from the true text of Shakespeare. Again and again he corrected them in their parts and begged them to look at the originals more carefully.

Woodfall was neither so conservative as to wish to have only the plays of the old stock list played, nor so up-to-date that only novelties pleased him. He wished for more revivals of good old plays. Yet when Cumberland adapted *The Duke of Milan* by Philip Massinger, Woodfall was almost alone among the critics in condemning it (November 11, 1779). He wished to see Mrs. Dolly Jordan in a revival of *Twelfth Night* but did not wish to see her give up her popular rôle of Peggy in *The Country Girl*, Garrick's adaptation of Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (November 1, 1785). He joined in the belief that *The Beggar's Opera* had had evil moral influence in the country, yet he was not at all taken in by the sentimental repentance scene added to it in 1777:

This alteration our readers will perceive, is extremely moral, they must not, therefore, wonder if they find it somewhat dull in presentation; morality and dullness are frequently stage companions, and to say the truth, to give a grave conclusion to a merry performance must of necessity savour of heaviness. . . . With regard to the writing, it is but a *beggarly* sort of composition, and so extremely different from Master Gay's penmanship, that it gives the opera a patch-like appearance and (if we may be allowed to borrow a figure out of the loom) resembles a German serge skirt, hung upon the tail of a coat of English broadcloth. In justification of it, however, it may be

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, October 15, 1777.

remarked that it enforces poetical justice by punishing the vicious; and what renders it still more palatable is this—if any part of the audience dislike it they need not sit the performance out.<sup>30</sup>

Any attempt to dress up too elaborately or to change the spirit of *The Beggar's Opera* met with his disapproval; he wrote a very spirited criticism of a performance in September, 1776:

Mrs. Mattocks acted Lucy with tolerable spirit but made a gross mistake when she conjured up her crying countenance. Lucy is (if we may borrow a word from the Newgate *Vade Mecum*, and we don't know why we should not, as we are speaking of Lockit's daughter) a wench of too much *spunk* to shed tears for a fellow; she'd rather have made Mackheath cry by giving him a smart down in the chops, than have cried herself. We never saw this character better played than by Catley two winters since; she gave it as Gay wrote it; entered into the true humour of it, and forbore to Italianise the songs. Indeed we feel ourselves much hurt that an author's meaning should be so daringly deserted as is that of poor Gay in the modern stile of representing his famous Opera. What would Gay have said last night, had he been living, to have seen his hero, whose best dress he has expressly limited to a TARNISHED *laced coat*, walking about all the two first acts in an elegant scarlet frock lined with silk and ornamented with silver frogs—Oh propriety! propriety! how art thou sacrificed to vanity and coxcombry at Covent Garden Theatre! where it will not be wonderful if Filch appears *en macaroni* ere the end of the season.

Contemporary tragedy did not appeal very strongly to Woodfall. Such things as Dow's *Sethona* and Cumberland's *The Carmelite* called down his wrath for their absurdities and

so much drivelling, so much bombast, so much incongruity of metaphor, and above all so much bare-faced plagiarism, that we cannot refrain from saying to the Managers, "No more of this, if you love us."<sup>30a</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, October 18, 1777

<sup>30a</sup> *Ibid*, February 21, 1774, and October 29, 1785. Woodfall may have been the author of the paragraph published December 16, 1771, which declared that "dramatic writing in this age is a mere blank in comparison with what it was in the last age. It is not for us to cope with our ancestors for the bay. It does not become us to stroak the chin, arch the eyebrow, or as-

But he was quick to see the real merit of the comedies of Sheridan. His review of *The Rivals* (January 18, 1775) is not one of his best pieces of writing; it leans rather heavily upon the conventional tests of drama; but it shows a perception that the author was, in spite of his many deficiencies, a man of genius. A similar judgment is passed upon *The Duenna* (November 22, 1775), with the prediction that great things will come from the same pen. The review of *The School for Scandal* (May 9, 1777) is a long and interesting discussion of the satire of the piece and of the characters, closing with the statement:

Upon the whole, the *School for Scandal* justifies the very great and cordial reception it met with, it is certainly a good comedy, and we should not at all wonder if it becomes as great a favorite as the *Duenna* to which it is infinitely superior in point of sense, satire, and moral.

In his criticism of actors, Woodfall is seen to be a follower first of the Garrick school of realistic acting. He had some lurking ancient feeling for the grand days of declamation; when Thomas Sheridan declaimed *Cato*, for example, he felt that the harmony between the poetry of the play and the dignified style of recitation was really effective; but a week later when he saw Sheridan act the part of Pierre in *Venice Preserved*, he saw at once the difference between declamation and acting. When Henderson came on the scene Woodfall was sympathetic but by no means completely captivated. He had seen Henderson at Bath and had advised him to stay in the provinces where he was sure of fame, and had tried to advise him about his playing.<sup>31</sup> He held the balance nicely during the rivalry between Henderson

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sume the important nod, when Rowe, Congreve, and Otway are talked of —alas, gentlemen, it becomes us only to be humble, who had never cause to be proud”

<sup>31</sup> Peake, R. B. *Memoirs of the Colman Family*, Vol I, pp. 423-24. See also a letter from Woodfall signed “The London Rider” in the *Morning Chronicle* September 26, 1776, which was his first published criticism of Henderson, written from Bath.

and John Philip Kemble after the latter's début in 1783 until Henderson's death in 1785. Then he became a devotee of the "Kemble religion" as much as his cautious temperament and his desire to instruct the actors would allow. His greeting of Mrs. Siddons on her début in London in 1782 is characteristic; after reporting the event and giving the incidents in her career up to the present, he went on to describe her acting:

Blessed with a fine figure, a profile at once grand, elegant, and striking, an eye expressive and commanding, and a voice beautifully plaintive and yet sufficiently powerful to give full scope to every natural vent of passion, Mrs. Siddons now comes forward an original, an accomplished, and in many respects a capital actress. In *Isabella* she arrested the attention, wrung the heart, astonished the listening ear, and for the most part gratified the judgment. Perhaps there has not been a character in tragedy played with such success since the days of Mrs Cibber. . . We join in the general joy (over her triumph) and are glad to give this testimony of our satisfaction.—At the same time we thus early caution Mrs Siddons not to be giddy with her success. She has more sensibility than almost any actress we know, and there cannot be a better qualification for a tragedian, but it requires some judgment to put so powerful a faculty to its right use. Here and there, even in *Isabella*, there wanted, we will venture to say, a little relief. The expression requisite was more than once an assumed, if not a real magnanimity; and she has to learn, that she may speak with energy, and yet not "split the ears of the groundlings"; this seems to be a fault she has been betrayed into by those who have told her she was supposed to want power. The good sense of Mrs Siddons and her friends will tell her these are neither frivolous, nor useless hints; we mean not to lessen her claim to publick favours, but rather to assist and strengthen her right to it, and therefore we will add no more, trusting that Mr King will make a proper use of what we have suggested, and not doubting that Mrs Siddons herself will one day own her gratitude that we have not said more than enough.

If a critic must get himself aboard the bandwagon, perhaps this is as good a way as another. From then on Woodfall's criticisms of Mrs. Siddons and her brother were full of advice as well as of description of their playing of various rôles. But Woodfall

also appreciated a lighter form of acting; he enjoyed farce and was particularly ready to admire the work of Samuel Foote in farce and dramatic satire.

Though William Woodfall was not the liveliest writer of the century nor a man of sure gift of expression, his criticisms range up and down the drama and the aspects of theatrical performance in his day. Some of them make excellent reading, but altogether they form, as the historian of English newspapers remarked long ago, "a neglected mine of wealth for students of theatrical history."<sup>32</sup>

The *Morning Post*, though it lost the services of the Reverend Henry Bate after 1780, continued to publish reports of the theatrical affairs. At first it had reviews only of new plays and revivals; these reviews have no interesting reading in them; a sample of the judgments frequent in them is the remark that *Julius Caesar* has no dramatic situations in it. In 1782 a series, "The Drama," began, with regular articles on the theatre, though with special reviews whenever new plays were produced. It is probable that about this time the reviews were beginning to be written by John Taylor, the oculist and miscellaneous writer, whose *Records of My Life* is a mine of information about famous as well as forgotten personalities of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The quality of the criticisms in the *Morning Post* begins to improve. In 1785 and 1786 there is considerable development. New plays receive the most careful and detailed criticism; the reviews of Cumberland's tragedy, *The Carmelite*, even extended through six issues of the paper. The current offerings in the repertory are given short paragraphs regularly. The opera is reviewed with the same care as the drama proper. Actors and actresses are watched over paternally and constantly advised about their art. On March 4, 1786, began a series, "The Drama," which ran to No. X, May 27. The articles consist of short sentences of judgment of plays and especially

<sup>32</sup> Bourne, H. R. Fox, *English Newspapers*, Vol I, p 219.

of players, no critical essays. There is also a series called the "Opera Gazette"; these articles are written with a good deal of sprightliness, humor, and appreciation. The opera had been for a long time consistently attacked on moral, patriotic, and artistic grounds, it is at last seen to be an accepted form of drama about which the public needs informing as much as about the "legitimate" theatre. The "Opera Gazette" ran from No. I, January 26, to No. XXII, June 10. On September 27 appeared No. I of "The Scene," signed "Quin," a letter promising regular criticism of all the theatres—a promise not kept, for no more articles by "Quin" appear. Yet through the year paragraphs of information and even criticism are published, reporting on practically all the performances in the theatres, and reviewing in full the new plays. By 1788 the critical paragraphs have become very much set in form and even in substance. They appear daily, but contain only about thirty lines, a sentence each to "fable," "characters," etc., and to each chief actor. As this sort of thing is characteristic of many of the newspapers towards the end of the century and is the type of thing that Leigh Hunt set out to ridicule and to displace with more imaginative criticism, we may quote the whole of one article here:

The motley drama of *King and No King* by Beaumont and Fletcher was revived last night at this house, with such alterations as the nature of present manners necessarily required

This play with all its improbabilities and much heaviness as to the serious parts of it contains many noble sentiments, much forcible imagery and powerful language and in the comic scenes, a considerable share of humour . . .

The character of *Pantaea* admits no great scope for theatrical excellence, but all that could be made of it, was amply effected by Miss Brunton.

The laughable poltroonery of *Bessus* was given with admirable humour by RYDER, who has never appeared before a London audience with greater advantage.

- Aickin was firm and manly in the noble frankness of *Mardonius*, and Farren in *Tigranes* was far from mediocrity.

That the criticism could sometimes take on a sharper tone is shown by the following lines on Kemble's performance as Lear:

The great defect of his representation arose from a want of bodily powers, for the character is drawn with such a variety of emotions, that it really demands considerable vigour to sustain it with proper energy, and therefore in the "whirlwind of the passion," Kemble was obliged to sink into softness, when the text obviously required the most choleric effusions of rage.

The deportment was far from conveying the image of a distressed monarch, and rather excited the idea of a *jaded porter*; and the imbecility produced by age and agony was not managed with judgment, as it either came before, or immediately succeeded the excesses of vehemence that were expressed with too juvenile an animation.<sup>33</sup>

And of a new play this critic could write equally caustically, as in the review of Mrs. Cowley's *Fate of Sparta*:

Such a load of empty fustian, and heavy common-place, we hardly ever before had the mortification of attending. There is not one sentiment in the piece, which has not been hackneyed a thousand and a thousand times, and the imagery is so ridiculously mythological, that notwithstanding the laudable exertions of the performers, we were in constant expectation of a general laugh.<sup>34</sup>

For the rest of the period of our study there are no critical articles in the *Morning Post* which differ from the conventional paragraphs which most of the larger papers were then publishing.

We may look for a moment now at the work of John Taylor during this period. He became dramatic critic for the *Morning Post* some years before 1787.<sup>35</sup> There is also a possibility that he had already done some writing for the *Morning Herald* after Bate established that daily in 1780.<sup>36</sup> We know that he became editor of the *Morning Post* in 1787, or thereabouts, and held that

<sup>33</sup> *Morning Post*, January 25, 1788.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, February 1, 1788.

<sup>35</sup> Taylor, John. *Records of My Life*, New York, 1833, p. 382.

<sup>36</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1832, Vol II, p. 90.

position for about two years. The writing on the *Post* which may safely be attributed to him is especially interesting during the years 1785 and 1786. He gives many descriptions of the acting of Mrs. Siddons in some of her successful and unsuccessful attempts, of Kemble, and of some other actors of the time. He is no blind worshipper of the Kemble family, and his criticism defends itself by the vivid descriptions which it gives of the actor's way of playing a part. We may see some aspects of Mrs. Siddons's art in her first years on the London stage in these reviews:

Mrs. Siddons last night appeared for the first time in the character of Lady Macbeth. Throughout the first and second acts Mrs. Siddons never exhibited such chaste, such accomplished acting. There being little or no declamation, our ears were not wounded with the repetition of the *lark's shrill note*, or the blundering distribution of a vitiated emphasis; the total absence of the pathetic prevented that perpetual shaking of the head and tossing of the chin, which we have before remarked as her principal defects in that line of acting, and the violent exertion of her arms, which shocks the critical spectator in Belvidera and Calista was suited to the masculine ferocity of the heroine in this drama.

Mrs. Siddons was at first much agitated; in the scenes with Macbeth immediately before and after the murder of Duncan she was admirably expressive of the genuine sense and spirit of the author; but in the banquet scene in the third act, her abilities did not shine to so much lustre. In several passages of the dialogue, she adopted too much the *familiar* manner, approaching to the *comic*; this may be called her *epilogue* style in which she has already experienced an entire failure. In this scene an exception must be made to her rebuke of Macbeth (though even that had not the powerful effect we might have expected from Mrs. Siddons) and the congé to her guests, which last was delivered with inimitable grace.

In the taper scene she was defective; her enunciation was too confined . . . the faces she made were horrid and even ugly, without being strictly just or expressive. She appeared in three several dresses. The first was handsome and neatly elegant; the second rich and splendid, but somewhat *pantomimical*, and the last one of the least becoming, to speak no worse of it, of any she ever wore upon

the stage. Lady Macbeth is supposed to be *asleep* and not *mad*; so that custom itself cannot be alledged as a justification for her appearing in *white sattin.*<sup>37</sup>

*Mrs. Siddons in Rosalind.* The attempts of performers to excite the public curiosity and to engage the attention of the town to their benefits should always be considered at least as inoffensive if not laudable, and therefore should be exempted from the ordinary strictness of critical remark. Every actor is privileged on such an occasion to put himself before his friends in as ridiculous a situation as he thinks proper; and it is not only permitted to reverse the sexes, but to commit every other violence against propriety that is at the same time consistent with the *utmost latitude* of decorum and subservient to the interest of the performer. In this point of view the attempt on Saturday of Mrs. Siddons should pass in silence; but as the town has been taught to expect some novelty in the entertainment which they have heretofore received from the performances of this admired actress, a candid examination of her talents for the line of acting which she has recently engaged in, is a duty which we owe to the public.

With the sincerity and decision which it is always our aim to preserve in our criticisms we must pronounce Mrs. Siddons from the specimen she gave on Saturday night, utterly void of that humour which is the soul of Comedy. She shewed in various parts of the character she undertook much taste and feeling; but she pleased only in the sentimental passages. Her *entrees* and her walk (or rather strut) on the stage, were those of Lady Macbeth or Belvidera, not of the volatile and sprightly Rosalind. Too close an attention to emphasis, and to a frittering refinement with a quaint sinking of her voice, rendered her utterance occasionally inaudible; and the shake and declination of her head were the only indications of gaiety and humour.

Mrs. Siddons, however, received very great applause; and who would not shew their judgment in applauding so great, so eminent an actress? But she was acting Comedy; she was delivering some of the most witty conceits of Shakespeare—Did the audience laugh? Were they diverted? No They were too much wrapped up in admiration at the extraordinary refinement of the actress: applause they gave in abundance; but reserved their laughter for Mrs. Wrichten.

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<sup>37</sup> *Morning Post*, February 3, 1785.

If in this impartial consideration of Mrs. Siddons's capabilities for comedy we may be allowed to advert to more minute affairs, we must observe that her dress was the most unaccountable we ever witnessed upon the stage. It was not that of either man or woman Her Hussar boots with a gardener's apron and petticoat behind, gave her a most equivocal appearance, which rendered Orlando's stupidity astonishing, in not making a premature discovery of his mistress. What caused Mrs. Siddons to innovate upon the former representations of this character in the article of dress we cannot guess, but we are certain that she could not appear to less advantage in any other habiliment whatever.<sup>ss</sup>

Taylor's comments on drama are of little interest. He found such a popular tragedy as Ambrose Philips' *Distrest Mother* mere "stuff," a sign that he had lost some of the taste for the imitation French tragedy of the Augustans. He favored the alterations which Thomas Hull made in *Timon of Athens*, especially the addition of women's parts. He preferred to have Gay's opera played in comic fashion rather than in the new sentimental manner; of Polly's character he wrote, "Gay meant it for burlesque, but modern times insist on its being serious"; which made it for him "whining insipidity."

In the first number of the *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser*, November 1, 1780, with which Henry Bate greeted the public after his breach with the proprietors of the *Morning Post*, we find a section headed "Dramatic Orders," "Parole. SHAKESPEARE; Countersign, GARRICK." In military metaphor Bate explains his plan for theatrical criticism:

In consequence of a shameful relaxation of discipline in both the dramatic corps now on duty in the British metropolis, arising, as there is every reason to imagine, from the deluge of *puffs* and *panegyrics* that has been so indiscriminately and unmeritedly poured on all ranks after every *field day*—I have it in command to inform the *whole line* that as they will undergo various reviews by *detachment* in the course of the present campaign, they are therefore expected in future to appear always on Parade *regimentally dressed*, and not to

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<sup>ss</sup> *Ibid.*, May 2, 1785.

*talk in the ranks* as they have been so shamefully accustomed to, on pain of the severest punishment; of which all *Adjutants, Muster-masters, etc. etc.* are required to be particularly observant

It is likewise thought necessary to intimate to the *Commanding Officer* of the first brigade that as example is the strongest excitement to true discipline, it is requested that *he himself* be more attentive in future to the discharge of the duty he owes the public!

Signed THEATRICUS

*First Aid du Camp to MELPOMENE and THALIA,  
Commandresses in chief of all Dramatic Forces  
in Great Britain, etc. etc.*

*Given at Headquarters on Mount Parnassus.*

The *Herald* published during its first year regular paragraphs of "theatrical intelligence" which consisted of long summaries of the incidents of new plays and full details about the familiar performances, but with only a meager paragraph of comment either praising indiscriminately or damning in like fashion. Bate's writing, if indeed he wrote many of these at all, had completely lost whatever savor it once had. He made no attempt to write serious essays of criticism. After Mrs. Siddons made her début in 1782 and Mrs. Abington returned to the stage, the reports were more frequent but no more interesting as criticism.<sup>89</sup> He was one of the early admirers of Mrs. Siddons, but he, like most of the other critics, found her wanting in comic parts. Bate wrote a critique upon the début of Mrs. Dolly Jordan which can be taken as a specimen of the kind of theatrical criticism to be found in the *Morning Herald* in this last period of our study:

<sup>89</sup> Elbridge Colby in his *Bibliography of Thomas Holcroft*, New York, Publications of New York Public Library, 1922, p. 41, attributes to Holcroft numerous articles in the *Morning Herald*:

*Parisian Intelligence* (under "Events of the Day"), April 21, 22, 30, May 10, 13, and 26, 1783.

*Drama*, No. I, June 5.

*Miscellaneous Observations and the Drama*, No. II to No. XXI (June 10 to November 5, irregularly).

See also Captain Colby's edition of *The Life of Thomas Holcroft*, 1925, Vol. I, p. 255.

The *Country Girl* altered from Wycherley was last night brought forward at this Theatre to give introduction to Mrs. Jordan, late of the York Theatre, in the part of the Country Girl. The character was well chosen, and properly adapted to her *forte*. Her figure though little is neat, and when in the attire masculine, she looked\* smart and active. Her features, though not handsome, are highly animated; her voice is cheerful, and her articulation distinct.—The *narvete* and archness of the character were given with proper force. The points of the dialogue were well conveyed and the hoyden action and manner she assumed, were extremely consonant. We wish we had no occasion to except against her dress; but it had not sufficiently an air of rusticity, and gave rather the idea of a *town*, than *country girl*. We must add, that the lady in question appears possessed of requisites highly comic in their effect, and when she has pleased repeated houses in the *Country Girl* will, no doubt, give equal satisfaction in similar characters.<sup>40</sup>

At this point we run across a very vigorous protest against such criticism as we have been reading: a protest is published in another periodical, a short-lived newspaper called *The British Mercury and Evening Advertiser*, which existed from November 1 to the end of December, 1780. In the very first number, under the heading "The Dramatist, or Critique upon Critics," some of our own criticisms of the writing of the theatrical critics whom we have been studying were voiced:

There is not anything perhaps more *ridiculous* amongst the great variety of serious productions which appear in the News-Papers than the daily sentences on *plays* and *players*, pronounced by the different *would-be* Critics who infest the Morning prints and who so pompously assume the *Dictatorship* of the *Drama*.

In one paper we are informed that "Mr. *Such-a-one* (notwithstanding the frequent hints which had been given him by a most discerning Critic) persisted in exhibiting a more than proper degree of ANIMATION in *Such-a-scene*." In another we are told that the same performer "would have been unparalleled in his part, had he possessed a little more ANIMATION in the same scene." One tells us that "such a character was most elegantly and judiciously dressed by Mrs. Ab-

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<sup>40</sup> *Morning Herald*, October 19, 1785. Quoted also in Clare Jerrold's *Story of Dorothy Jordan*, pp 83-84

ington," and another expresses his "astonishment that an actress of Mrs. Abington's judgment in *parts* and acknowledged elegance of fancy *in dress*, should have worn a habit as unsuitable and injudiciously chosen." One condemns an actor for introducing Macbeth in boots. Another admires the happy idea and insists that it was highly improbable that so great a man as Macbeth would have taken a walk upon a swampy heath without the precaution to put his boots on. A critic in one paper has no sooner excited our admiration at the incomparable merits of *his favourite actor*, in *his favourite way*, than if we look into the paper which lies next it on a coffee-house table, we are entertained with some severe strictures against managers, who had cast their characters so badly and suffered that performer to *murder* a part which had been so excellently acted in the estimation of the other critic; and by way of *nota bene*, the managers are asked "whether Mr. *Such-a-one* would not have been more equal to the character?"

Under such circumstances then, what must be the condition of the performers? In truth they often sacrifice the dictates of their own judgments and experience, to their fears of receiving the daily lash of petulance, ignorance, or partiality. And to protect the members of so useful and liberal a profession, in the rational and unawed pursuit of their duty to the public, the DRAMATIST has bespoke a place in the BRITISH MERCURY: where he will from time to time as occasion may require, stand forth in their defence, and rescue the stage from that *critical tyranny* under which it has groaned for so long a time, and makes little doubt of having frequent occasions to prove that, when such critics assume the seat of judgment their cause is, literally *coram non judice*.

\*\*\* The Dramatist invites the correspondence of all liberal writers on dramatic subjects, to which he will ever pay the most respectful attention.

"The Dramatist, No. II," November 20, contains a letter from a correspondent warning against counter-attacks from critics who will not spare even the persons of their enemies. "The Dramatist" replies that he had not intended to speak against the whole body of critics, for he knows the value of candid and liberal criticism. He would attack merely the abuse of the critical position. He knows some critics of candor and ability; and then he knows another set of them with neither "erudition nor hon-

our," "who decide upon the language of authors in a style that betrays a total ignorance of the first principles of grammar, etc." The third (and last) number of "The Dramatist," November 27, contained a long and amusing tale, conjured up by imagining the meeting of two people of fashion who had got their opinions of a recent performance from the reading of the morning papers and then tried to exchange those opinions in a friendly conversation. The point of the tale was to expose the contradictoriness of the daily theatrical reports. The next day the *Mercury* published a letter from "X.Y.Z." explaining that as the newspaper critics knew nothing about Aristotle or Horace, they had to drag in the discussions of dress, gesture, tones of voice, and so forth; he called on them to hunt bigger game than that. It may be recalled that this newspaper was also that which published the gossip of the greenroom which told of the quarrel of the actors with the critic of the *Gazetteer* who happened also to be the husband of the author of the play they had performed—performed, according to him, so badly. Three numbers only of "The Green-Room Earwig" were published.<sup>41</sup> In the meantime the only theatrical intelligence which this rebellious *British Mercury* published was taken from the *Morning Herald!* In its short life it printed no original critiques of plays or performances.

Nothing is said of theatrical criticism in the address "To the Public" in the first number of the *Daily Universal Register and Times*, January 1, 1785, which was to become *The Times* and to continue until our day. An examination of the few extant numbers of the early issues of the paper, from 1785 to 1792, shows that there was regular "theatrical intelligence," but without any notable character. The essay manner has not pushed out the reporter even by the fall of 1793 when the reviews get longer and more frequent. In 1794 the critiques are a little better than the worst type of "theatrical intelligence." They have some humor, some good sense, plenty of good nature, but no great

<sup>41</sup> See above, pp. 209-10

critical or even descriptive power. The next year the reports continued, but in the fall the tone became that of mere puffs—"the indefatigable managers," "a reign of sense has begun," and—"crowded audiences" always to proclaim new performers who never fail to score hits These are the very things that Leigh Hunt took up the cudgel against in 1805. Such a spirit did not continue indefinitely in *The Times*, however, for we find in 1796 some rather lively writing from an independent point of view. And by 1798 the reviews of new plays have lengthened out into something like essays.

The *Oracle; or Bell's New World* was commenced on June 1, 1789, as a rival to the *World*. The editor was James Boaden, best known now as the author of biographies of John Philip Kemble, Mrs. Siddons, Mrs. Jordan, and Mrs. Elizabeth Inchbald, and as the editor of the Garrick Correspondence. Boaden was born on May 23, 1762, at Whitehaven, Cumberland, the son of a merchant in the Russia trade. He came to London with his parents early in life and was educated for commerce. After a time in the countinghouse he turned to journalism and soon became the editor of the *Oracle*. Charles Mathews, the famous comic actor, wrote in his *Memoirs* that Boaden was "a celebrated dramatic critic . . . devoted to the Kemble family, and on terms of intimacy with 'Glorious John'"; and that he (Mathews) as a young actor looked up to Boaden and his rivals on the *World* "as arbiters of the fate and fame of many a Thespian hero."<sup>42</sup> Boaden began his work as a dramatist in 1793 with a musical romance, *Osmyn and Daraxa*. From then on to 1803 he wrote a number of comedies, musical romances, and melodramas. He gained some fame by his pronouncements upon the Ireland forgeries of Shakespeare manuscripts and by a tract about the identity of the person to whom Shakespeare addressed his sonnets.<sup>43</sup> He is described as "a man of amiable manners and wide

<sup>42</sup> *Memoirs of Charles Mathews*, 1838, Vol. I, p. 59.

<sup>43</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, "James Boaden."

information; witty in conversation and possessed of a good store of anecdotes."

While he was editor of the *Oracle*, Boaden undertook to criticize the performances in the theatres. It cannot be said authoritatively that all the critiques in the paper after its commencement were by the editor, however. Mathews says that another friend of his, John Litchfield, later to be the husband of the celebrated actress Mrs. Litchfield, often wrote theatrical criticism for both the *Oracle* and the *World*.<sup>44</sup> Only after about the middle of 1791 do the articles show unmistakably the characteristics of Boaden's thought. However, there was regular criticism of the performances from the early days of the paper. The writer, whether Boaden or not, showed a real interest in and appreciation for the drama, and wrote something more than mere news notes. He showed certain prejudices: a dislike for Italian opera, a dislike for the personality of John Kemble, which led him to be very harsh upon Kemble for his faults and his unsatisfactory performances, and an undue partiality towards the work of the academic dramatist William Hayley. He attempted to take an independent stand in criticism and prided himself upon the spontaneity of his criticism. Of *The Battle of Hexham* by George Colman, Junior, he wrote (August 12, 1789):

This piece was received with unbounded applause; and we have given the history of it as it appeared to us on the *instant* of representation, without previous knowledge or information.

Our criticism is governed by the same rules that swayed Molière; namely, the old woman in the Chimney Corner, (in other words) we judge of the play by its *effect* on the audience.

So far had theatrical criticism sprung from the old closet criticism; but this theory of popular judgment led unfortunately to such a declaration as that "perhaps no imitation of Shakespeare's manner was ever more exact than *The Battle of Hexham*; and any one so good is not in our recollection, unless Falstaff's

<sup>44</sup> *Op. cit.*, Vol I, p 58

*Wedding* by Kenrick be that one." The critic was, however, a worshipper (though a blind one) of Shakespeare. A review of a revival of *The Tempest* (October 14, 1789) says:

- After the *Shipwreck* which *Sense* and *Sentiment* have so often met with on the English Stage the revival of the Dramas of Shakespeare must afford a cheering sight to every rational mind.

The *Tempest* has been got up at this Theatre with much care, producing the whole strength of the house

The *Tempest* of all Shakespeare's Works bears the strongest traits of his vast creative genius. It is the Child of Fancy—of that Heaven-taught Fancy which transports the mind at pleasure into the airy regions or leads it through the abyss profound.

Then, as though the critic had indeed reached the "abyss profound":

The *Tempest* certainly owes much to the additions of Dryden, and as now brought forward presents an entertainment of the most pleasing and rational nature.

Dryden, however, is the only one of the adapters of Shakespeare who escaped the wrath of this critic; he called Nahum Tate "one of these blockheads" who dare to make additions to Shakespeare; and he swung into a fine peroration which was also good criticism of the sentimental conclusion which the century had endured tacked on to the end of *King Lear*:

*King Lear*, without doubt, the noblest Tragedy existing, has thus been disgraced by puny addition, and the whole *moral* force of the Poem totally conjured away. Instead of the fine catastrophe of the original Play, where monstrous irascibility and impetuous pride sink sacrificed upon the *Altar of Justice*, here *Restoration* comes, with *healing wings*, as if our hearts were too tender for misery—capable indeed of a *sigh*, but too imbecile for *true tragic passion*.<sup>45</sup>

A final specimen of the rhapsodical style of this critic is the review of *As You Like It* (November 21, 1789):

This Play which if not the best of Shakespeare is better than the best of any other Writer; with such various holds upon the Mind of ART and NATURE—where *Philosophy* and *Feeling* so gratify and agi-

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<sup>45</sup> The *Oracle*, November 24, 1789.

tate. how is it to be paralleled? Here is *Pastoral* that Intelligence need not sicken at—here is *document* that reaches to the *heart*.

If ever the pretensions of a *Sister Art* struggling in vain competition, can be silenced it is here;—where the *Poet* so distances the *Painter*, that the highest powers of the *pencil* fade before the superior blaze of *living Verse*.

“Thoughts that *breathe*, and words that *burn*,  
Heard no more!”

This, however, is the age of *pure Criticism*—an age, whose highest honour is the labour of elucidation, and the liberality of praise.

This review, like many others during the first two years of the paper's run, is signed “Choroides.” It is a fair supposition that John Litchfield wrote over that pseudonym.

In the last months of 1791, all through 1792, and frequently thereafter there appeared a group of criticisms signed “Thespis,” which can fairly certainly be ascribed to James Boaden.<sup>46</sup> As became the future biographer of Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble, the critic worshipped those players just this side idolatry. Mrs. Siddons was indeed his divinity and no fault came near the throne. Her Isabella in Southerne's *Fatal Marriage* and Belvidera in Otway's *Venice Preserved* were her best parts. Though he could find some flaws in Kemble's acting of comic rôles, he could enjoy him so thoroughly in tragedy that even his Othello, not one of his most successful parts, according to the general verdict of the times, was satisfactory to Boaden. He liked Kemble best, however, in *Coriolanus*, and that, from all accounts, was probably Kemble's best part. Boaden was best in his criticism of Shakespeare, though he was by no means faultless in taste nor able to escape some of the errors of his day. He longed for a complete restoration of *King Lear* which would throw out Tate's alterations both in plot and language. His love

<sup>46</sup> A corroborative fact is that when Boaden's melodrama, *The Secret Tribunal*, was played near the first of June, 1795, “Thespis,” instead of re-reviewing it himself, reprinted instead the critique of the *Morning Chronicle*, June 4, 1795, and later other paragraphs from the *Gazetteer* and from the *Morning Advertiser*.

of Shakespeare made him wonder how another lover of him could think of trying to make a Greek choral drama in English. He objected to the choral additions to *Macbeth* because they detracted from the solemnity of the Witches. When he was acclaiming the power of the actor Dicky Suett to act the scenes of comedy in the midst of tragedy without making buffoonery out of them, he declared that if ever Garrick's dream of restoring the Fool to the play of *Lear* could be made to come true, Suett would be the man to create the part. His criticisms of actors in the famous parts in Shakespeare's plays were all based upon a careful, detailed study of the plays and a thorough knowledge of the lines. His writing about Shakespeare and the actors' interpretations became more animated and imaginative. When he came to review new plays, Boaden was not so interesting. He fell into the jargon of the conventional criticism of the day: he spoke of "nature," the "vis comica," and "originality and probability," and then gave advice about *correcting* the play before it was to appear again. He was something of a lover of the *comédie larmoyante*; in reviewing *Paul and Virginia* (March 28, 1795) he became as sentimental as the most tearful of dramatists:

It exhibits the tyranny of European masters and the terrors of the negro slaves—it shews how compassion in the WHITES produces gratitude in the people of COLOUR, which despairs all danger, and hazards life with transport. Blessed be God, humanity seems rapidly to be recovering her rights, and the applause given to this piece evinces our sensibility of a WRONG, and the pleasure with which we should offer the atonement! In uncultivated breasts REVENGE is not a more ardent passion than LOVE; and policy and nature alike point out the conduct of those, who boast of refinement by which the one is liberalized and the other softened.

Yet he could see also that a play like *The Conscious Lovers*, however good a sermon it might be in the closet, wants "the life of the comic structure," and he complained that there was "no food for mirth" in it. He could, then, appreciate the farcical

creations of John O'Keeffe. The modern opera he found fault with for its lack of ideas, of thought. Everywhere Boaden spoke with courtesy and intelligence; he was a gentleman critic who lent dignity to the profession as well as more learning than was common.

There still remain a large number of daily, thrice-a-week, and weekly newspapers which contained during this last period some reporting and occasionally some criticism of the theatrical performances. In none of them, however, have we found any substantial body of critical literature. To describe their contents would be to repeat the same story a large number of times. In this period most of the papers carried the short paragraph reports. Many carried also the extended accounts of new plays, consisting of the summary of the plot and some brief sentences of comment. Here and there one finds a few paragraphs which show a more vigorous writer at work. On the whole the department of theatrical criticism is established in the common newspaper. As in all periods, it remains for some paper to discover on its staff a man of talent as a critic, before the articles are worthy of being brought again to light.

The magazines of this period are so numerous that it becomes well-nigh impossible to deal with them all. They are of all sorts, those devoted primarily to politics, those devoted to fashionable amusements, those devoted to literary reviewing, and others of specialized or amazingly general appeal. Like the newspapers many of them took it for granted that a department should be devoted to the reports from the theatres. It was still easy, however, to copy the critiques from the newspapers or to rely merely upon the "account" or summary of plot. We shall not have to take up in great detail more than a scant few of these periodicals. For instance, of a magazine like the *British Magazine and Review*, edited by W. Dodd, July, 1782, to December, 1783, it needs merely to be said that it had regular theatrical criticism, but that none of it is of any literary value;

the *General Magazine and Impartial Review*, June, 1787, to February, 1791, while it promised original criticisms and doubtless continued to be impartial, printed only mere jottings of comment, rhapsodies of praise; the *New London Magazine*, July, 1785, to December, 1789, published regular but undistinguished theatricals.<sup>47</sup> In our study we shall take up, then, only those which we have found to contain material of historical or literary interest.

The *European Magazine and London Review*, which was to be one of the prominent long-lived magazines carrying on into the next century, commenced with the January issue, 1782. In the "Introduction" the editors said: "Under this heading—(i.e. "The Theatre")—will be included the Theatres both foreign and domestic; to which particular attention will be paid, and we doubt not but by the assistance of our correspondents abroad,

"The *Literary Magazine and British Review* (1788-94) at first published no theatrical criticism; then after a few scattered reviews it promised (June, 1790): "As many of our readers have signified their wishes to have an account of theatrical amusements, we shall in compliance with their request, give a copious criticism on every new piece and performer"; and thereafter a section of "Theatrical Intelligence" appeared in almost every issue to the end of 1793, containing reviews of new plays written in a very perfunctory spirit, however.

The *Literary Review and Political Journal*, October, 1794, to May, 1795, printed reviews occasionally of new plays which had been published, but without much reference to the performance of the play in the theatre.

The *Attic Miscellany* (No. I, October, 1789, to No XXXVI, August, 1792) contained theatrical criticism in two sections Under "Epitome of the Times" were reports of the theatres, prefaced with a declaration of impartiality in a world where all other newspaper critics were to be bought out with free admissions, and consisting of mere reporter's notes and a line or two of comment. In December, 1789, appeared the first number of a series called "The Actor, by Theatricus Automaton, Esq.," which ran to No. XV (No XX of the *Miscellany*). These papers are ironical rebukes of the Drury Lane organization, especially Kemble and the comedian Edwin, advice to actors, and sneers at managers; they are not really criticism at all.

we shall be enabled to give an account of every new piece that comes forward, either on the French or the Italian stage." The first article on the theatres took a boldly independent stand and spoke contemptuously of the plays of the season and of the puffing which had tried to make them palatable to the town. It commented on several plays and told anecdotes of the authors. The next eight months the articles contained merely the stories of new plays and the briefest of comments. In October came a "Theatrical Journal," full of greenroom gossip and notes about many performances. Nothing but plots and brief comments appeared then until well into 1783. We find some considerably more valuable criticism after September, 1783; there are reviews of Kemble's début, of Mrs. Siddons in *Measure for Measure*, of Kemble and Mrs. Siddons in *The Gamester*, and of M. P. Andrews's play *The Reparation*. As some of the longer and better critiques are certainly copied, without acknowledgment, from the *St. James's Chronicle*, and as at times within a few years the criticisms directly contradict each other, it is scarcely useful to try to make any study of the opinions of the critic, for he was more clearly a composite figure than even the anonymous writers for the newspapers. The magazine contains a great deal of writing about the theatres, whether original or not.

Henry Maty's *New Review* (1782-86) is merely a literary review and deals with plays only infrequently as they are published. Yet one of the reviews had the point of view of the theatrical critic. At the end of an enthusiastic review of Cumberland's play, *The Mysterious Husband*, he wrote: "After all, these were my impressions on seeing the piece, but it may affect others differently." The reviews of Mrs. Cowley's *Belle's Stratagem* and Robert Jephson's *Count of Narbonne* (April, 1782) are rather spirited pieces of writing from the point of view of a spectator.

The *New Lady's Magazine, or Polite and Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex*, by the Reverend Mr. Charles Stan-

hope, beginning February, 1786, printed a good deal of material about the theatres; there were short reviews of some performances for each month, sometimes of a new play or of a new player, or merely the current offerings. The comment seems to be of an independent sort, though it may have been copied from some newspaper. In 1787 the reviews became longer and more pretentious, they were attempts at serious criticism, somewhat pedantic, and were neither entirely eulogistic nor entirely fault-finding. In March, 1788, a series, "The Theatre," commenced over the signature of "Dramaticus." At the end of his first number he wrote, "I have only room in this place to assure my readers that they may depend upon having not only an account of all the new pieces, but also a miscellaneous account regularly of plays, performers, theatrical anecdotes, etc. etc. etc." His later articles are more inclined to praise than to be critical, consequently while there is comment enough, it is not very enlightening. The series ran to June, 1790, No. XXV.

We find in two periodicals of this period some general articles upon acting and actors by Thomas Holcroft, the radical politician and dramatist. He wrote first a series of papers called "The Actor" for the *Westminster Magazine* in 1780, from January to May.<sup>48</sup> The first paper promised candid and impartial criticism; the second began the history of European theatres, describing first the state of dramatic art and public taste in Germany; the third gave an account of the drama in Spain and Italy and France; the fourth dealt with English drama—it claimed that the licentiousness of the Restoration comedy was due to the French influence, that the English excelled naturally in wit and humor, character and incident, and that the English tragedy, despite Voltaire, was deserving of praise, and it discussed the distinctness with which Shakespeare marked his characters in their language and sentiments; the fifth and last dis-

<sup>48</sup> See Elbridge Colby, *A Bibliography of Thomas Holcroft*, New York, Publications of New York Public Library, 1922, p. 35.

cussed some principles of acting—the importance of proper delivery of lines, of the study of the meaning of the text rather than the manner of other actors, the way to deliver a soliloquy, the importance of gesture and bodily expression. The other series of articles is more specific in its criticism. In the *English Review* from its first number in January, 1783, to May of the same year, there was a section devoted to the theatre. These essays have been attributed to Holcroft;<sup>49</sup> they cease the month after he left England in April, 1783, to become foreign correspondent for the *Morning Herald* and for the publisher J. Rivington.<sup>50</sup> After that the *English Review* contained no theatrical criticism; its reviews of published plays as a rule have no reference to the performances. The first of Holcroft's articles discussed "A State of the English Stage" and gave a criticism of the new plays which had been produced from September, 1781, to May, 1782. Holcroft first discussed the characters of the managers of Drury Lane and Covent Garden Theatres as they affected the advancement of the drama in England. The plays criticized were Jephson's *Count of Narbonne*, Pratt's *Fair Circassian*, Holcroft's *Duplicity*, Mrs. Cowley's *Which is the Man?* and many others, comedies, operas, and farces. There is the distinct flavor of Holcroft's personality in some of this criticism; for we detect the radical rationalist in the objections to an ancestral curse, which an "age of enlightenment" cannot believe in, and to a character who mouths "superstitious omens and religious dogmas . . . which certainly have an ill effect in the

<sup>49</sup> Colby, *op. cit.*, p. 40. The ascription is based upon an item in the list of Holcroft's works found in The *Monthly Mirror* for December, 1799 (8:326): "All the Criticisms and Remarks on the Drama in the early numbers of the *English Review*."

<sup>50</sup> See *The Life of Thomas Holcroft, Written by Himself, Continued to the Time of His Death from His Diary Notes and Other Papers by William Hazlitt, and now Newly Edited with Introduction and Notes by Elbridge Colby*, 2 Volumes, London, Constable and Company, 1925, Vol I, pp. 255, 264-65 and note.

mouth of a consistent and elevated character." In the February *Review* was printed the first installment of "A View of the Performers, Tragic and Comic, of the London Theatres, and of their respective Powers and Abilities." The tragic actors of Drury Lane were described in detail. In March there was a long essay on the acting of Mrs. Siddons, with many details about her acting in her major parts. The next two numbers dealt with the comic actors and the comic actresses respectively. Remarks on the actors of Covent Garden Theatre were deferred until next season, but the series was not resumed. The May article ended with these characteristic remarks of Holcroft:

The Theatre is as well worthy the contemplation of the Philosopher and the Legislator, as the Man of Taste. We are persuaded it contributes, in its present state, to humanize the heart, and correct the manners. It turns the follies of mankind into ridicule, it gives the most beautiful precepts for their conduct, it allures them to the practice of virtue by declamation conveyed in thoughts so poetical, and language so attractive, as to delight the imagination without burthening the memory, and it deters them from the commission of crimes, by exhibiting terrible examples of the dreadful consequences of vice. If it is not uniform in the tendency of its effects, it is because Legislators have never yet been sufficiently convinced of the power of the Drama, to incorporate it with the constitution, and make it a legal and necessary establishment; or rather, perhaps, because some men were fearful, lest while they were erecting the temple of morality, they should erase the tottering structure of superstition, in the preservation of which themselves, their children, or their dependents were materially interested.

These essays are readable descriptions of some of the popular performances of the time. They are fully as vivid and imaginatively written as Leigh Hunt's *Critical Essays on the Performers* (1807).

In some of the weekly essay periodicals and specialized theatrical magazines we find a number of interesting comments upon both the state of the theatres and the state of theatrical criticism. The *New Spectator with the Opinions of John Bull* com-

mences in February 3, 1784, with the following remarks in its introduction:

The accounts daily given to the world of theatrical affairs are sometimes so contradictory to truth and to one another, that I have frequently lamented the want of a public journal of dramatic proceedings, from which some judgment might be formed as to the real merits and demerits of plays and players; and I trust, Friend SPECTATOR, with your permission, and with your assistance, to render the NEW SPECTATOR, subservient to so laudable a design.

Of the affairs at Drury Lane the author went on to say:

It reflects no small credit on the manager of this house, to say that he is, if not an enemy, at least no friend to *puffing*; nor does he put Mrs. Siddons's name at the top of his bills by way of hooking the multitude; a device practised by the other house, in regard to Mrs. Crawford, in the same manner and probably with as much success as KATTERFELTO<sup>51</sup> exhibits at the top of his bills, the angels, devils, and the devil knows what, of his own sublime invention.

Another of "John Bull's" opinions went further in condemnation of alleged publicity campaigns:

Last night the *self-be-paraphrased*, the *self-puffed* and the *self-adoring* Mother Abington appeared in *Lady Betty Modish*. It is impossible to withhold praise from so excellent a performance, and I will always give merit its due, but when it is said the stage is inanimate without her; that she is the comic muse, in *propria persona*, and such rubbish as the papers continually abound with respecting this woman, who, I should imagine kept half a dozen clerks for the purpose of writing to her honour and glory, an ingenuous mind cannot but feel itself disgusted; and half tempted to deny her excellence.

The theatrical criticism in the *New Spectator* consists largely of attacks like this upon Mrs. Abington and praise for Mrs. Siddons and her brother.<sup>52</sup>

The state of theatrical criticism in the newspapers at this time drew forth a periodical devoted chiefly to ridicule of it. The

<sup>51</sup> Gustavus Katterfelto, Prussian quack-doctor and conjurer who advertised his exhibitions sensationaly in the papers

<sup>52</sup> The *New Spectator* ran to No. XXII, June 29, 1784; then skipped to No. XXIII, June 4, 1785, and No. XXIV, June 11, 1785; then to the last number No XXV, January 17, 1786

spirit of ridicule of the critics entered also the attempts to criticize the new plays; the result is that the essays are not worth very much as criticism of the drama, for they are primarily attacks upon other critics. This periodical had the long title of *The Devil: Containing a Review and Investigation of all Public Subjects whatever; Calculated to furnish the World with every Material Intelligence and Remark, relative to Literature, Arts, Arms, Commerce, Men, Measures, the Court, the Cabinet, the Senate, the Bar, the Pulpit, and the Stage; which together with all other of the various Topics that excite universal Curiosity, will be treated with no less Firmness and Freedom, than Fairness and Candour. The whole self-evidently intended as a disinterested and handsome Tribute to the Liberty of The ENGLISH Press. The above Work (in consequence of a very extraordinary Visitation and Suggestion to the Editor) is set on Foot by a Society of LITERARY GENTLEMEN; With a View to—"Hold the Mirror up to Nature, to shew Virtue her own Feature, etc."* The first of the twenty-two weekly numbers appeared on October 2, 1786; the complete set was published in two volumes in 1787. The "visitation" was the fiction of an appearance of the Devil to the editor with instructions as to how to conduct this critical publication. Among other instructions was the following ironical description of the art of theatrical criticism:

For the stage also you must be an adept in puffing; for if you cannot demonstrate that languor is delicacy—rant, fire—stalking, grace—coldness, judgment—noise, feeling—affection, ease—grinace, wit—buffoonery, humour—or, distortion, the *vis comica*, you know not *theatrically* how to praise the acting of the day. If you cannot prove that bombast is the true sublime—ribaldry, genuine comedy—plagiary, originality—or, a pun, the *ne plus ultra* of wit, you must not attempt to speak of the performances And, if you have not the knack adroitly to represent that a thin audience is an overflowing one—that silence, dissatisfaction, contempt, nods, shrugs, and shakes of the head, are bursts of applause—roars of laughter, universal approbation! transport! delight!—for I believe the theatres have now gone through every expression of satisfaction .

in the language but extacy and rapture—you are not fit to describe the reception every performance is sure to meet with in the dramatic advertisements on the day following its first representation; though three-fourths of the audience had, the evening before, gone away perfectly of opinion that it had been completely damned.

“The Devil” then went on to complain that the papers found perfection in the stage now, whereas it was notoriously degenerate:

Will they say Kemble’s reading by rote is equal to Garrick’s union of good sense, nice feeling, and exquisite acting,—or Edwin’s *burlesque* of nature, to Shuter’s *utterance* of it?—But the inducement is evident; and while free admission, and now and then the reception of a farce, can insure the newspapers, trash must go down, and the new school, as it is called, impotent as it is, be palmed on the rising generation, as an improvement of the old one; though, Heaven knows! a spider’s web may with as much propriety be instanced as an improvement on the labours of a silk worm.

When the writer of the *Devil* approached the criticism of plays, he first quoted and analyzed and answered the criticisms of the other periodicals; his criticism consisted of rebuttal of the other critics, and rebuttal of a simple dogmatic sort. For example, in No. IV, reviewing *Richard Cœur de Lion*, an opera, the reviews of the *Morning Herald*, *Public Advertiser*, *Morning Chronicle*, *Morning Post*, *General Advertiser*, *Gazetteer*, *Public Ledger*, and *Universal Register (Times)*, were summarized and answered; then the opera was taken up in detail, compared with its French original, and quoted from. In the following number the criticism was carried further, with special reference to the performance, scenery, dresses and so forth—again after quoting the other papers’ critiques. At the close of this critique the writer said:

Thus have I acted with a firmness that ever shall characterize this work. Thirty years ago there was not a newspaper but would have done the same—long since that time the *Morning Chronicle* was remarkable for the honest boldness and unbiased truth of its strictures, and some others spoke their minds. Now, either through private friendship, or private convenience, ‘tis a known fact, that they all go

with the stream, and are theatrical advocates, instead of theatrical censors.<sup>53</sup>

Occasionally he drew an answering fire from the newspapers he had attacked and would then return to the attack. Much of his space is spent squabbling with William Woodfall and other critics, while the original and direct criticism of plays and players languishes. Through several numbers<sup>54</sup> ran an ironical "Plan for Constructing Dramatic Pieces upon Mechanical Principles," which was a lively satire upon the drama of the times. The writer also seemed to harbor a dislike for Sheridan's work, for he attacked *The Duenna* and *The School for Scandal*, chiefly on the ground of plagiarism.

An equally bitter critic was at work on the *Devil's Pocket Book*, which was also published in 1786. In the "Introductory Address to the Public," he said, among other things:

We mean to dedicate a considerable partition of this paper for the investigation of all dramatic subjects, under the title of the DRAMA. . . . To restore the stage to its primitive dignity shall be the unceasing endeavour of our minds, and the grand object of our animadversions, to force its lordly despots to a state of repentance and . . . lation for the enormities of their management, to disrobe them of their habitual insolence, strengthen their treasury, regulate their manners, abolish their insolence, purify their minds by the force of irresistible and honest admonition, and make them finally tremble at the bar of public justice, for the unlicensed commission of vices and follies that have been too long permitted to sleep in oblivion, by the contaminated Editors of the prints of the day.

In the second number he discussed the dignity of the drama in ancient times and the degeneracy at the present time; and he attacked all the actors, including Kemble and Mrs. Siddons, all the dramatists, comic and tragic, and all the managers. In the nine numbers which were published, are some paragraphs on performances, which carry on this sweeping criticism into details. Of Mrs. Siddons in Dodsley's *Cleone*, for example, he wrote:

<sup>53</sup> See Vol. I, p. 73.

<sup>54</sup> Vol. I, Nos. VI, VII, VIII, and Vol. II, No. III.

Mrs. Siddons is manifestly the child of Art; her best positions convey strongly the idea of having been previously studied; they do not seem to arise out of the circumstances of the moment. The most confirmed ideot of the Theatre, who has seen her exhibit but three different characters can tell by the extension of one arm, when to expect an *Ah!* and by the brandishing of the other when to expect an *Oh!* The same gestures accompany her mad exertions in all parts; and it does not signify a rush whether the heroine of the piece is an Eastern Princess, or a private gentlewoman.

But the paper was too short-lived to afford us much criticism.

Two essay periodicals of the *Spectator* type, the *Busy Body* (No. I, January 2, to No. XXV, February 26, 1787) and the *Trifler* (No. I, May 31, 1788, to No. 43, March 21, 1789), contained a few essays upon theatrical topics. A more important essay paper, the *Bystander or Universal Weekly Expositor* (No. I, August 15, 1789, to No. XXII, February 6, 1790), was undertaken by Charles Dibdin to promote his reputation as composer of musical drama. The first reference to the theatres is found in the "Weekly Retrospect" on September 19, after the opening of the theatres for the winter season; it is an attack upon the insipidity and the venality of the newspaper critics. The next week the managers were attacked for their treatment of the actors; and the public was blamed for the bloated reputations of actresses. There followed discussions of the acting of the present in comparison with that of twenty years ago—"the good old days." In the criticisms of new plays, the critic first took space to attack the newspaper criticisms; while he laughed at the other critics, he neglected to make very much comment of his own. He published regular articles on the European theatres, historical and general; hence drama took up a great deal of space in the periodical. But the criticism is too much bound up with the desire to refute his rivals. There also appeared specimens of the music of Charles Dibdin. At the end of the series the "*Bystander*" took his farewell with the remark that the paper "was set on foot to assist the reputation of Mr. Dibdin. . . . We are

not disappointed in finding that the exertions of Mr. Dibdin have proved the greatest credit and profit to the *Bystander*."

We have to speak now of two theatrical periodicals. There is some good criticism in the *Prompter*, a daily paper which ran from No. I, October 24, 1789, to No. XIX, December 10, 1789.<sup>55</sup> The object of the paper was announced as assistance towards uplifting the taste of audiences, and the management of the theatres. The editor promised serious, impartial criticism, as the common newspapers had not "room, time, nor perhaps some other requisites necessary for an attempt of this nature." Of contemporary drama he wrote that it consisted too much of punning and "slip-slop humour" and relied too much on foreign originals. When Frederic Reynolds's play, *The Dramatist*, was produced, this critic gave it a long and careful review, beginning with a lament for the descent of English drama into folly even below French folly, and attacking this play for its disjointed combination of "humours" and its lack of true comic humor or wit. The manner of analysis of the play and the abundance of supporting quotations give an impression that the critic is really trying to be just in his estimate. He is ready, however, to accept wholly such a play as *The Citizen*, which Arthur Murphy had taken from Destouches, and he called *The West Indian* the best modern comedy. He showed signs of excellent taste and sense in his remarks upon Shakespeare; he said of *Henry the Fifth*:

Some of his speeches, even the very best, are too long. Tho' we can never have enough of Shakespeare in the closet, yet it is very easy to cloy us with him on the stage. He is too rich to feed long upon;

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"In the Catalogue of the Hope Collection of Periodicals in the Bodleian Library there is a note: "a daily paper, by James Fennell, devoted critically to the performances at the theatres. It ceased abruptly." In No. III, October 27, 1789, there is a paragraph of glowing praise for Fennell's acting in *Othello*; yet in No. VII, November 4, 1789, a note on his playing as Hotspur calls him not vivacious enough and too monotonous in voice. Could either or both of these be by the actor himself?

and of Cordelia:

Cordelia was the favourite daughter of Lear. Her sisters had replied to him with an extravagance suited to the extravagance of his affection. He expected much more from Cordelia. Yet her reply was better suited to the relation that subsisted between them, than<sup>a</sup> to the fondness of his present humor;

and of the alterations of *The Tempest*:

The *Tempest* always brings a full house, but the audience were disappointed and displeased at the liberties taken by authors and managers with one of our poet's most celebrated comedies. Some of the most interesting and humorous scenes are omitted. Stephano and the Counsellor Gonzalo in the storm were designed to shew the sailor and the landsman at sea, and that scene, one of the most admired, is left out. That boisterous rudeness, and characteristic diction, which Shakespeare thought so essential to the first part of the play, suffered an inhuman amputation, and was nowhere preserved, but when Stephano and Trinculo meet with Caliban. It is a very hazardous attempt to alter Shakespeare's writing, for we at once lose connection, thought, stile, and language. This is very observable in both Dryden and Cibber's new modelling of this comedy. The Characters of Hippolito and Dorinda<sup>56</sup> are well supported and afford great entertainment; but they are not natural, or drawn with such judgment; nor are they so critically accurate as Shakespeare would have made them. The artlessness, innocence, life and novelty of Dorinda, however, give great pleasure, as does the surprise of Hippolito and his consequent love, on seeing Dorinda for the first time. There is a playfulness of language, only suited to such an extraordinary situation, that makes the scenes where these two characters appear, very interesting; but the effect of the whole is not uniform. Shakespeare painted this beautiful woman on an enchanted island with her father only; excepting Caliban, she had never seen any man

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<sup>a</sup> These characters had been added by Davenant and Dryden to the acting version of *The Tempest* which was popular on the stage through the century, in spite of occasional revivals of the original of Shakespeare. Dorinda was a hoydenish sister of Miranda, Hippolito was a young man who had been kept prisoner by Prospero and had never seen a woman until he met Dorinda. Professor Odell is "inclined to believe that this alteration is the worst perversion of Shakespeare in the two-century history of such atrocities." (*Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, Vol. I, pp. 31-33.)

but him; and that monster, the poet has thus figured, that he might more naturally raise her surprise and astonishment at her seeing Ferdinand. Their love is instantaneous, nature is seen in every word, in every look, that pass between them; and the love scene in the original, which is also omitted, is heightened with language the most beautiful and pathetic, whereas in the alteration, the dividing our attention betwixt two men and two women, takes away from the interest and lessens curiosity. The duel,<sup>57</sup> with whatever else has been added, does not compensate for such an encroachment on so great an author. The Manager has been very judicious in the dresses (that of Prospero particularly), scenery, decorations, and Machinery. Here Shakespeare's invention has been done justice to. The Storm, the furies, the ships on fire, had an awful effect, and the view of the Sea at the end of the Comedy did honour to the taste of the artist.

The other theatrical paper was more certainly by James Fennell, the actor. It was called the *Theatrical Guardian*, and ran from No. I, March 5, 1791, to No. VI, April 9. The purposes were to convince men that in principle the drama is beneficial to mankind, to point out the dignity of the theatrical profession, to show what the present conditions were, to expose the disgraceful conduct of the managers of one theatre, and to provide an impartial forum where all complaints might be expressed and given to the public for judgment. Among the complaints against the manager of Covent Garden Theatre was the obviously capital one of having refused Mr. Fennell's comedy *Lindor and Clara; or The British Officer*; it was such actions of the managers which were bringing about the dearth in good drama. In the second number Fennell accused the newspaper critics of being under the control of the managers. Essays in further numbers include one on the use and respectability of the stage, one on the means by which the respectability may be preserved, lessened, and lost (which led him to describe the virtues neces-

<sup>57</sup> "Hippolito, having seen and admired Dorinda, and learning now that there are many such beautiful women in the world, resolves to have every one of them. Hence Ferdinand, to preserve at least Miranda . . . is forced to fight a duel with [him]." Odell, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 32.

sary to a manager and the faults to which they were specially liable), and a final one on the black character of the manager who suppressed genius. In the midst of this special pleading and personal recrimination against a manager who had judged against his play, Fennell wrote a few paragraphs about plays and performances then current. He showed no critical power, and always came back to the matter of the deficiencies of the managers. He was obviously showing preference for the organization at Drury Lane, and especially showed his admiration for Kemble and Mrs. Siddons. He was accused—and tried to answer the accusation—of puffing the Drury Lane people in hopes of getting a position with them.

## CONCLUSION

Although there is no particular reason why 1795 should be chosen as the terminal date in a study of eighteenth-century theatrical criticism, yet about this time a number of changes were taking place in the greater newspapers, which may be said to mark the beginning of nineteenth-century journalism. James Perry bought into the ownership of the *Morning Chronicle* in 1789, became its guiding spirit into the third decade of the next century, and made it the most prominent liberal paper in London during the stormy Napoleonic period. Daniel Stuart became one of the owners of the *Morning Post* in 1795 and through the same exciting period attracted to its service famous writers like Sir James Mackintosh, Coleridge, Lamb, Southey, and Wordsworth. Stuart also bought an evening paper, the *Courier*, in 1799, and raised it to a place of great prominence in the next generation. The fourth of the great newspapers was the *Daily Universal Register*, which having begun in 1785, changed its name to *The Times and Daily Universal Register* in 1788 and later to *The Times*. Slowly *The Times*, under the John Walters, first and second, came to the front as the leader of the moderate Tory camp. The study of any aspect of journalism in the last few years of the eighteenth century would lead to the study of these journals, all of which belong to the next era.

By the year 1795, at last, the profession of theatrical critic was established. The newspapers in great numbers were publishing regular critical articles about the plays and the acting. Prominent men have been discovered to be the authors of many of the series of anonymous criticisms. In this study of the later years of the century we have confined ourselves to giving an account

of the chief series and their writers, without attempting to follow in detail the contributions to the development of dramatic criticism or taste. Yet these innumerable articles will be found to contain judgments and reflections which should add to our knowledge of the currents of thought about literature. Especially will they be found to contain less formal or academic opinions; they either reflect or influence the public taste. Through them the fortunes of dramatists may be followed. In the study of the work of the obscure dramatists who are at the present time being reviewed by many scholars for their historical importance, such criticism is invaluable. After 1795 it is clear that there is no further development in newspaper criticism itself; from that time to this we can be sure that the theatre will get at least its proper share of contemporary discussion.

In another sense 1795 is an undramatic moment for the close of the study. It would seem the natural thing to carry it forward to the time of Leigh Hunt and William Hazlitt, for they were the greatest of a long line of critics whom we have been following from Richard Steele forward. The only study of theatrical criticism which has hitherto been made is that of the late William Archer in the Introduction to his selections from Leigh Hunt's writings, published as *Dramatic Essays* in 1894.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Archer admitted at the start that he had not had the inclination nor the patience to search the newspapers before Leigh Hunt's time for theatrical criticism; but he declared his belief that nothing of any importance would be found, that before Hunt no one took the work of commenting upon the contemporary theatre either seriously or honestly, and that the few articles which might be found in the periodicals would be either worthless in style or untrustworthy. Thus Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt have been given credit for lifting theatrical criticism out of the slough of mere venal puffing into the clear air of impartial criticism. To one

<sup>1</sup>Hunt, Leigh. *Dramatic Essays*. Ed. by Archer, William, and Lowe, R. W. London, 1894.

who has read what the eighteenth century had to offer in the way of journalistic comment on the theatres the early reviews by Hunt in the *News*, 1805 to 1807, do not seem so revolutionary or epoch-making. And even the writings of Hazlitt are not without touches which remind one of the earlier critics. These men, with all their admitted genius in dramatic criticism, were the heirs of a long line of writers on the theatre. The present study has tried to make clear this descent, but it stops before reaching the appraisal of the enormous mass of writing which surrounds the work of both Hunt in 1805 and Hazlitt in 1814. After 1795 the study must become more intensive than this first survey can be.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

A full bibliography of the sources of this study would include the catalogues of the periodicals, of the dates within the period chosen, which are deposited in the Burney Collection in the British Museum, in the Hope Collection and the Nichols Collection in the Bodleian Library, in the New York Public Library, and in the libraries of Columbia and Yale Universities. During the writing of this book there appeared *A Census of British Newspapers and Periodicals, 1620-1800*, by Ronald S. Crane and F. B. Kaye, first published in *Studies in Philology*, Volume XXIV, pages 1 to 205. From this I learned of the existence of more collections of newspapers in American libraries than I had known of before, and I was able to make a further survey of some of these. Although I have not seen all of these collections and although there doubtless are some gaps in my survey due to the incompleteness of the files of some newspapers in the English libraries, I have examined the files of very nearly all the periodicals which have survived from the eighteenth century. A great number of them contained no theatrical criticism and hence are not mentioned in this study. Of the seventeenth-century news-letters my survey was much less exhaustive. Examination soon revealed that there would be practically no opportunities for criticism in such periodicals. Hence a rapid survey of the volumes in the Nichols Collection in the Bodleian Library seemed sufficient for the purposes of this study.

A list of the books consulted for theatrical history, history of journalism, lives of actors, dramatists, managers, editors, and critics, and other subsidiary information would be disproportionately long. It has been thought better merely to let the footnotes and the index serve to indicate the sources of my facts.



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